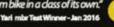


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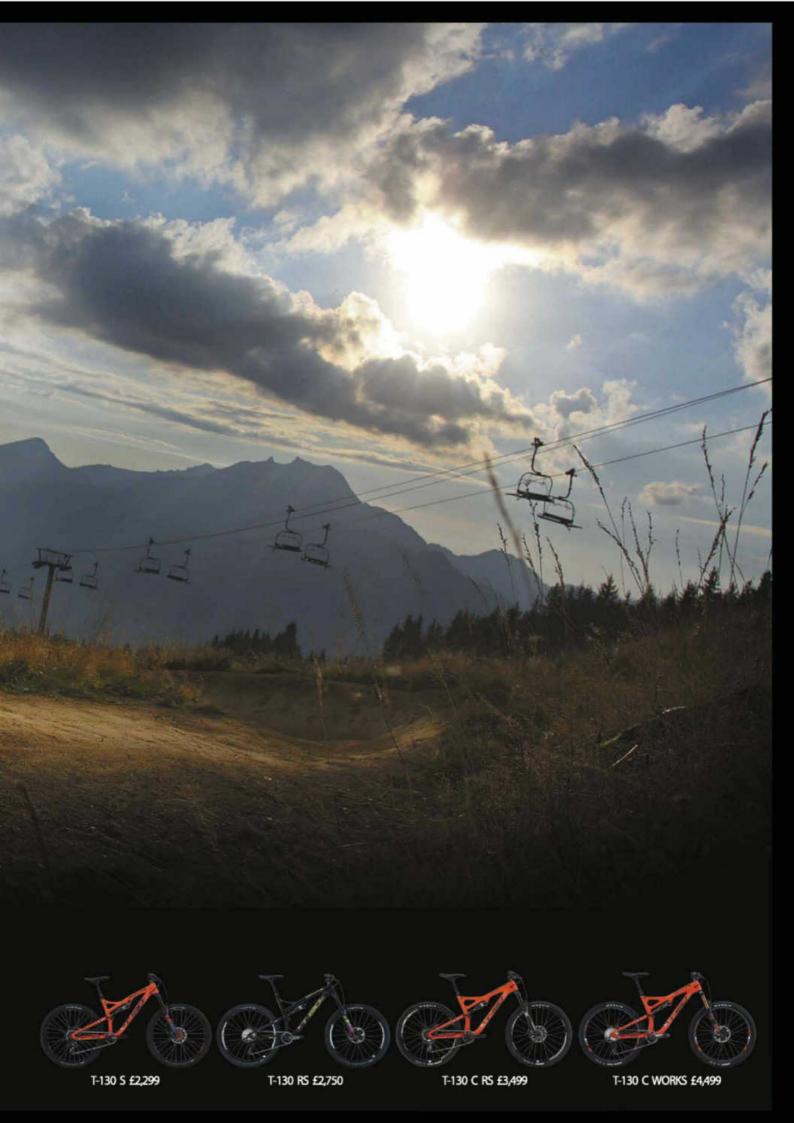
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FREE PULL-OUT MAPS*

Four great routes: The Peak District, South Downs, Winsford in Exmoor and South Barrule on the Isle of Man

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THE STUFF YOU HAVE TO GO TO FIRST!

EDITOR'S LETTER (

For those in need of a little inspiration...



Ever have those days when you're just not quite ready to get out of bed to meet your mates for that early morning ride you promised them? The warmth of the duvet, those extra precious minutes of sleep between snooze alarms... Be thankful, then, that you're not mates with moustachioed enduro legend Mark Weir. He likes to get up at 3am to chase the

sunrise. Admittedly it's from his home in Marin County, California, which is probably a more enjoyable experience than doing it from, say, Cleethorpes, Humberside, but still, that's some serious commitment to finding your perfect moment to ride and be at one with nature. Now, we're not suggesting this as your new regime for the year ahead, but Mark has his reasons for doing it — you can find out why on page 78 — and maybe his story is enough to inspire you to get out, ride more and find your special moment in the year ahead. Enjoy the issue.



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Danny Walter MBUK Editor in Chief



MBUK MARCH ISSUE 326

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RACEFACE.COM/DROPPER









Dig deep and we'll get digging!

fter the success of the UK's first crowdfunded mountain bike route, Ride Sheffield are at it again, with plans for a second trail and a new funding project to pay for it.

The advocacy group raised more than £75,000 to pay for the original 1.4km blue-graded XC loop in Lady Cannings Plantation, through rider donations, support from local businesses and sponsorship from GO Outdoors. They now want to build a 1.8km descent near Stanage Edge, to the south-west of the city. It would run through the wood next to the byway to Stanedge Pole, from the top corner

down to Redmires Road – hence the name, 'RADmires'.

Ride Sheffield's Henry Norman says it would be a "blue-grade flowing trail in the signature 'the faster you go, the tougher it is' style that makes that trail [Lady Cannings] so much fun, yet so accessible to all abilities". He adds: "There are some land features and gradients in the woods that'll allow some red/black opt-ins to keep things interesting for more advanced riders. RADmires aims to up the intensity a little to act as a bridge between Lady Cannings and some of the jumpier, faster, more featured trails over at Greno, and the rockier, steeper, more

technical trails around Stanage, Blacka Moor and Rivelin."

The group have the support of the city council's woodlands officer and now need to raise money so they can make the dream a reality. They've set a target of £45,000 and are accepting donations online at www. ridesheffield.org.uk. With one crowdfunded trail already under their belt, we reckon the prospects are good for this one! Once the money starts piling up they'll be applying for planning permission and working on the design stages of the build, with the aim to get the trail completed and open in summer 2017.

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05





HUD GLASSES

Fighter jet tech for the trails

AR-MOUNTED COMPUTERS can show you useful data, from your speed and heart rate to your position on a map. But when you're riding trails littered with roots, rocks and blind bends, glancing down at a screen can lead to disaster. If only there was some way to get that info without taking your eyes off the trail...

The idea of a fighter jet style heads-up display (HUD) for cyclists isn't new – Canadian company 4iiii Sportiiiis showed our sister site *BikeRadar* some prototype glasses that used LEDs and a speaker to relay ride info back in 2011 – but now the big boys are getting involved Garmin's new Varia

Vision device attaches to the side of your riding glasses and syncs with your phone or GPS computer to display live data in your line of vision. It's due to go on sale any time now for £319.99.

They've got some major rivals though, in the form of Intel, who've just purchased Recon Instruments, a Canadian company whose Jet glasses display all kinds of data on a small screen at the bottom of the right-hand lens. These £360 shades have a built-in computer, GPS receiver and camera, along with a full suite of sensors, so you can view ride data, navigate, capture video footage and even read text messages on the move. BikeRadar have tested the

system and say it has a lot of potential, though the screen interferes with your view of the trail ahead and requires a lot of eye movement to use.

That's something the latest brand to throw their hat into the ring, Israeli firm Everysight (a spin-off from a 'defence' tech company), are hoping to avoid. Their Raptor glasses use augmented reality technology to display info such as speed, bearing, altitude and position directly in the line of sight, and are due to hit shops later this year. If the system works as well as they say it does, it should be a big leap forward for data-hungry riders - or anyone who fancies channelling their inner Goose or Maverick.

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ÖHLINS RFX 34 FORK 《

05

First trail fork from moto suspension masters

hlins' suspension units are the choice of many big MotoGP and motocross teams, even though the Swedish company have a no-sponsorship policy. They dabbled in the MTB world in the mid '00s when they worked with Cane Creek on the highly rated Double Barrel shock, and resurfaced recently with a custom damper for Specialized's Demo 8 DH bike. The new RFX 34 fork is a result of that continuing partnership with Spesh. Designed for use on the Camber, Stumpjumper and Enduro, it's now available to the rest of us too.

The fork uses the same TTX twin-tube technology found in Öhlins' shocks, which separates the compression and rebound damping oil flow in a bid to improve performance and consistency. There are high and low-speed compression dials on the top of the crown, and a rebound adjuster at the bottom of one leg. This impressive damping technology is complemented by a triple air-spring system. Two positive springs control the spring rate, while a single negative spring affects the initial suppleness of the fork.

The stanchions are 34mm in diameter but Öhlins claim stiffness is similar to a 36mm fork thanks to the one-piece crown and steerer tube with built-in bearing race. The RFX 34 is currently availble for 29in wheels only, and the built-in bearing race restricts which head tubes it can be used with. Our sample weighs 2.06kg, which is 206g more than an equivalent RockShox Pike RCT3. There's a choice of three travel options though – 120, 140 and 160mm – and with rumours of a 650b version in the pipeline, we're sure it'll be finding its way onto quite a few bikes in future.

£850 Specialized www.specialized.com



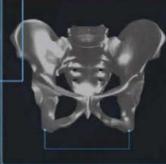


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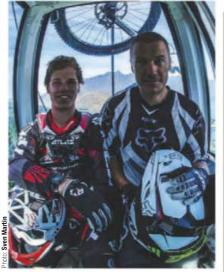
The Athertons

(Dad) Simon: In the early days I'd push Dan, Gee and Rachel's bikes up the hill, sort food for them, clean their bikes and do some mechanic work. I loved it. We used to haul an old caravan around so I could keep them warm and out of the rain and get decent food in them. Happy days!

(Mum) Andrea: I remember the house full of MTBing youths - me supplying food and them supplying mud and fun. Oh yes, and writing off my old pick-up doing uplifts!

Gee: A huge amount of what I am today has come from them, whether it's work ethic and commitment, or how to get stuck back in when the sport has kicked my ass and beaten me down.

Rachel: Without Athy [Dan] showing us the way we wouldn't have been world champs. But I'd be nothing without mum either - she's such an amazing, strong woman and role model. Then there were all those weekends at the races with Dad. We owe all of our success to the three of them.



The Greenlands

Laurie: I used to go and watch my dad at the Dragon Downhill races. Standing at the side, I wanted to race so bad! Later, it was a wicked thing to do together. It must have been boring waiting for me on rides but it was rad that I got to come along.

(Dad) Ben: Going racing with your kid is pretty cool. Win or lose, you hang out and support each other. Sometimes we got to grin at each other, both holding trophies!

Laurie: I've always listened to what my dad had to say, especially when it comes to racing. He has a way of making me feel good before race runs - something I miss when I'm at World Cups. Also, being a lot faster than me till I was 15, if I was doing something wrong he could help me out

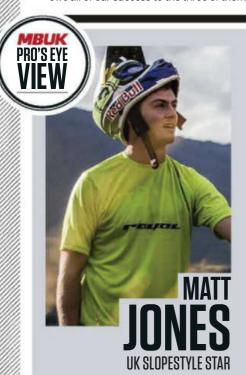
Ben: Spending time with your kids is special. Top results are good if you get them but supporting one another is the important bit. Never underestimate the never-ending excuses you'll have to buy bikes and go out and play in your 40s too!



The Carpenters

Manon: Pretty much all of my bike riding years up until I was 19 and moved into Elite were shaped by my Dad. We spent a lot of time together travelling to bike parks in different countries, riding locally and visiting skate parks, BMX tracks and dirt jumps around the UK. Without him I wouldn't have come anywhere near as far as I have done. He was the one who believed I could race at world level. I've had so many great experiences thanks to my parents giving my sister and me such a good childhood. It's not just the bikes, it's everything else that goes with it that teaches you so many lessons.

(Dad) Jason: My advice to other parents? Focus on skills first, speed later. Don't fixate on racing. BMX and DH races are an awful waste of valuable riding time - travelling, limited practice, queuing, waiting, watching, 45 seconds to three minutes of racing, more waiting... I never pushed Manon to go fast, just to focus on good technique. When you have the skills, the speed comes naturally.



Winter is always a weird one in the dirt jump world. I'm way less busy travelling, so I get to spend time

digging new lines and testing them out with friends. I'm lucky to live right by Woburn trails, which is a sandy riding spot

that somehow rides best during the winter months, so I've spent countless days there this winter, as well as riding at my private compound where I've been working on new tricks.

I've had a massive airbag there for a few months so I've been dialing in 360 double

tailwhips and 360 barspin to tailwhips, as well as keeping consistent with double backflips and other bangers that I want to keep locked down. Despite the cold and rain, winter attracts way more people to come and ride at Woburn, and this has

contributed to some insane sessions lately! We've built a whole new tech line to jib around on and to peer-pressure mates into trying crazy tricks or lines on.

The new year has come with some new sponsors for me too - Banshee, TSG, Gusset and WD-40 - and I'm stoked to

work with those guys for 2016. My contest season is about to kick off in New Zealand. It's crazy that the first event of the year is smack-bang on the other side of the world, but I'm stoked to be getting back out to the Farm Iam contest, I was last there in 2014 when I won the event, so it'll be awesome to try

to retain my title. Then there's the fact that New Zealand and the Southern Hemisphere are having their summer right now... Let's have it!



P Peaty

Steve Peat is a true legend of the British and international MTB scene. He's a down-to-earth sporting hero and hard-racing professional who still loves his beer and good times with his mates.

- Peaty is one of the most successful DH racers of all time, with 17 World Cups, three series titles and a World Champs gold medal to his name. The former plumber has also been British champ eight times.
- He currently races on the Santa Cruz Syndicate team with Greg Minnaar and Josh Bryceland, and at 40 is one of the oldest riders on the World Cup circuit. Over the years he's also ridden for Saracen, MBUK, GT and Orange.
- Away from the race track, Steve is a shrewd businessman. He part owns Royal Racing and helps develop their clothing, and has put his name on everything from whisky (the peaty, um, Peaty single malt) to

- coffee (Cappuccino Peaty's Flat Cap Espresso).
- He's a Sheffield lad through and through and gives back to the local riding community, endorsing trail projects and bringing his own race, the Steel City DH, to Grenoside Woods.
- Peaty is passionate about encouraging up-and-coming riders too, and has his own development team, the Steve Peat Syndicate.
- Famous for his wild partying with Shaun Palmer and Rob Warner in the '90s, Peaty is now a family man with a wife (former pro downhiller Adele Croxon) and two sons. He still likes a beer or two though...



noto: Scott Marken







Fiona has been living in Fort William for five years, after moving there from the rolling hills of Dumfries and Galloway, and loves it. Everyone seems to be into some kind of racing, whether it's running, swimming, biking or skiing. That's rubbed off on Fiona, and she really enjoys the buzz of competition, from hill running to enduro racing.



ACCOMMODATION

There are possibly more B&Bs in Fort William than there are genuine Highlanders!
Alltonside Guest House have a drying room for wet kit and cook a mean breakfast (www. alltonside.co.uk). Carinbrook, in Corpach, have space for bikes and, if you ask, will have fresh cake ready for your afternoon tea (www.fortwilliam-guesthouse.com/carinbrook. php)! The Glen Nevis and Lochy campsites are great if you're a bit more adventurous.





TRAILS

The riding around Fort William is very varied, from the steep, muddy ruts made famous by the Dudes of Hazzard to the flowy blues and World Cup XC loops in Leanachan Forest at the Nevis Range. This is where you'll find the main bulk of the trails and also, if you head up the gondola, the World Cup downhill track and Red Giant descent. Depending on where you're from, you might be surprised by this track's red grading!





ENTERTAINMENT

There's a variety of things to do when not riding your bike – 10-pin bowling at the Nevis Centre, free pool in the Lochy Pub on a Tuesday night, live bands on the High Street on a Friday or Saturday night, followed by a boogie at the Skipinnish Ceilidh House. For a proper Highland treat though, head to the Glenfinnan House Hotel on a Thursday night for a jam with local musicians who get louder and faster as the whisky flows!



FOOD

Fort William isn't the most 'gastro' of towns, but you can certainly get a full belly! The Lochy pub in Caol do big plates of pub grub – think fish and chips, steak and black pudding pie, burgers and steaks. No frills and perfect for refuelling. The Ben Nevis Inn are highly ranked on TripAdvisor. They do great food and have a lively atmosphere. They also sell real ales and have a good selection of whisky.







BIKEPEDIA

DOWNHILL BIKE

Can't tell a dirt jump bike from a downhill race rig? We're here to help!

When it comes to the steepest, gnarliest terrain, a DH bike is the fastest, safest way to get down the track. With lots of suspension travel, slack angles and tough wheels they're all about gravity-fed fun, whether you're at the bike park or a race.



Chain security

A full chain guide with top guide and bottom roller is the default set-up for DH bikes so the chain doesn't get thrown off on rough terrain. To protect the single front chainring from rock strikes. most also come with a bashguard.

Long travel

Modern DH bikes have around 200mm (7.9in) of obstacle munching travel front and rear, normally provided by a stiff, plush dual-crown fork and coil-sprung shock, though some racers have now moved to air shocks.

Wide bar

A wide cockpit – up to 800mm – is a must for high-speed control. DH bars come in alloy or carbon, and many use the new 35mm clamp standard. As well as stiffness and durability, vibration damping is an important quality.

DH-specific tyres with reinforced sidewalls are harder to puncture and protect the wheels from rocks and other obstacles. The thicker sidewalls let you run lower pressures, giving increased grip, especially in the turns.

Dual-ply tyres

A long wheelbase gives stability at speed, while a slack head angle keeps your weight over the bike when things get steep and a low bottom bracket helps to keep the bike planted in the corners.

geometry

DH BIKES

All you need to know...

What to wear: Keep things baggy – definitely no Lycra on the unlift bus! Some wear the bright colours of the factory teams whereas others prefer a more low-key look. Body armour and a full-face helmet are a must.

Where to ride: Fort William in Scotland hosts a round of the DH World Cup each year and for the price of a gondola pass you can ride the same track as the pros. Devon's Gawton Gravity Hub has four tracks, including Egypt, one of the most technical runs in the South.

Who to watch: Britain's own Rachel Atherton dominated the DH World Cup last year and is one of the most successful MTB racers of all time.

BEST OF BREED

Three to consider



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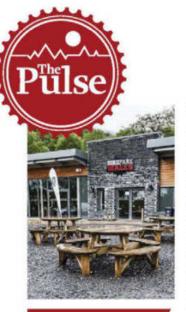
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THANK GOD FOR....

TRAIL CENTRE CAFES

Trail centre cafes provide two significant things to mountain bikers – firstly, a central location where we can meet, eat and greet, and secondly, a refuge from the onslaught Mother Nature has a habit of unleashing during our rides!

Mountain biking is a sociable sport, with a good old natter with mates being just as crucial to a good ride as miles of great singletrack. So the combination of great trails that are ridable whatever the weather and suitable for all abilities with somewhere to perch with a brew in hand and dry your shoes around the fire is second to none.

The trail centre cafe is the perfect place to analyse your mate's face-first encounter with the trail, relive the high-speed train down the final descent or gripe about parts of your bike that aren't functioning to their full potential! All over the country they're doing a sterling job, warming us up and providing us with our fill of coffee and cake. We're firm fans!

FLASHBACK

1980s & '90s

RETRO REGRETS

THE EARLY DAYS of

mountain biking were a time of experimentation. and that's obvious from the paint jobs! Some have stood the test of time and gained classic status, but plenty more were crude, garish or even psychedelic! Think clashing neon colours and splatter effect paint, with added stars and lightning bolts. We lusted after these designs at the time. but maybe they're best off staying in the '90s...



THAT WAS THEN THIS IS NOW!

#64 Paint jobs

2015 DESIGNER MINIMALISM

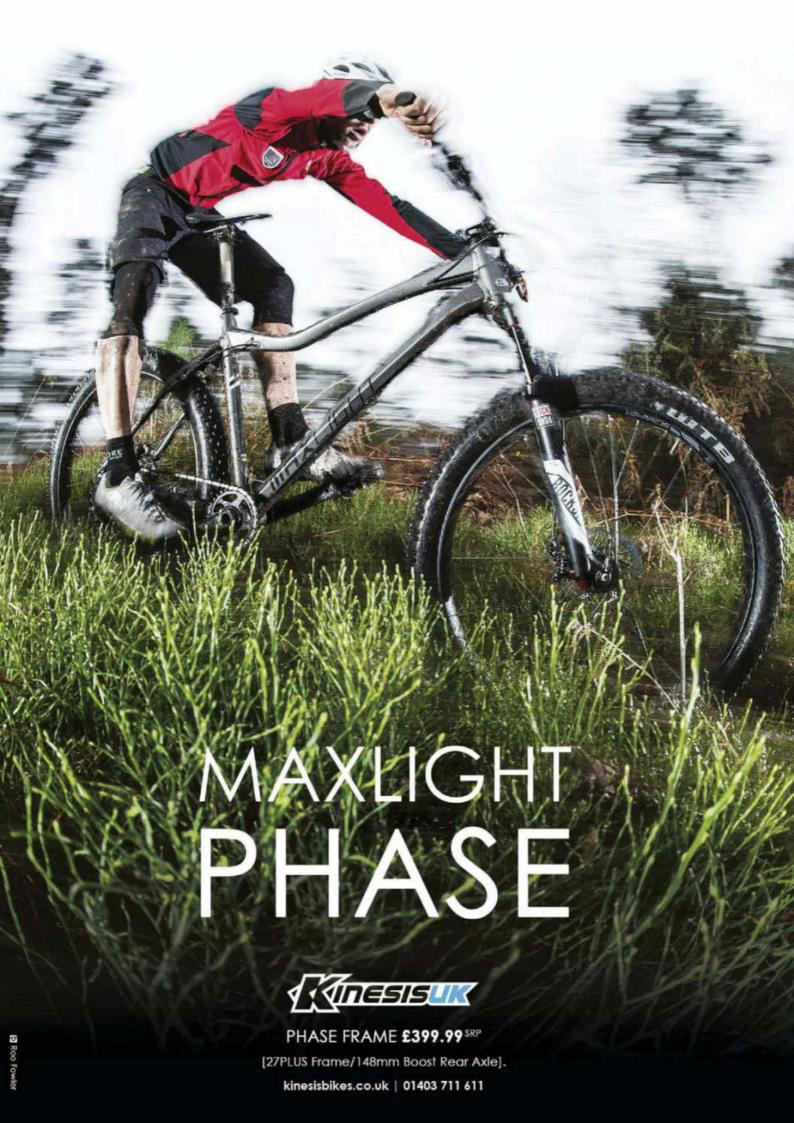
NEON'S MADE A bit of a comeback with the rise of enduro but today you're just as likely to find a matt black frame with just a splash of colour from the decals. Most paint jobs use just one or two colours, and brands stick to a common scheme throughout their ranges. Flashy designs could be making a comeback though, with custom paint jobs and resprays growing in popularity. Don't get too carried away guys!





#9 Rocky road, Grizedale Forest, Cumbria

Next time you venture to the Lake District, be sure to sample some of the homemade rocky road from the Grizedale Forest Cafe. Stuffed full of chocolate, digestive biscuit and marshmallow, this slice of sugary goodness is sure to satisfy your sweet tooth and give you a burst of energy. Chuck one in your pack and enjoy it with the kind of stunning views you only get in the Lakes.





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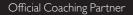
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→ LIVING THE DREAM →

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES FROM THOSE WHO'VE SUCCESSFULLY TURNED MOUNTAIN BIKING INTO MORE THAN JUST A HOBBY

Sam Needham

Photographer and designer

Yorkshire-based Sam has a wealth of talent, a clear vision of what he wants to achieve and a love of bikes and the 'golden hour', preferably together! Flick through his Instagram account and you'll be led through Sam's story – a tale of light, locations and losing himself around the globe.

I found my love for biking shortly after moving to Yorkshire, aged 12. The local moorland captured my friend's and my imagination so much that we thought we'd take our bikes up there and find out what it was all about. We caught the bug right away.

I have bikes to thank for getting me into photography. We had (and still have) a really good crew of riders here in Ilkley. When we were all getting into riding we'd spend countless hours on the moors, in the woods, hopping stair sets and the like. My friend Ross Parkinson and I used to share the picture-taking duties on a borrowed Nikon F50 film camera. It was always a good day going through stacks and stacks of developed film at the end of the year.

My two hobbies, biking and photography, gradually merged into a way to make a

living. I started getting my work noticed more and more, and opportunities started popping up. Eventually I had enough work to sustain me, so I left the bike shop I was working in to pursue what I love doing.

I love telling stories within my work and I like the thought of it inspiring someone to ride a bike, explore a little or even pick up a camera. I hope people will recognise this in my work. The other thing they'll remember me for is my hats!

A lot of inspiration for my work is drawn from outside the bike world. I have a love for design and illustration too, as well as filmmaking and music. My inspiration for new ideas comes from what I see and hear through all creative mediums. The great outdoors is always inspiring me too – being there, feeling it and riding through it come rain or shine always gets the brain ticking.

I have so much enthusiasm for what I do that I find deadlines a challenge! I'm always trying to do too much at once. Challenges are good though. You always learn something from them and at the very least they keep you on your toes!

This year has been a big one for me, a highlight being winning the Judges' Choice Award at this year's Deep Summer Photo Challenge at Crankworx Whistler. I'll never forget those three days of shooting, culminating with standing on the stage with my good friends and team

having just taken the win. It was a pretty amazing experience.

Deep Summer was one of the most incredible photoshoots I've ever been on.

You really can't beat shooting and riding with good friends, no matter what challenges you face. Other than that, the most memorable photoshoots are the adventurous ones, due to the real documentation we do and the places bikes can take you. The world is a truly amazing place and there's no better way to explore it than by bike – and with a camera!

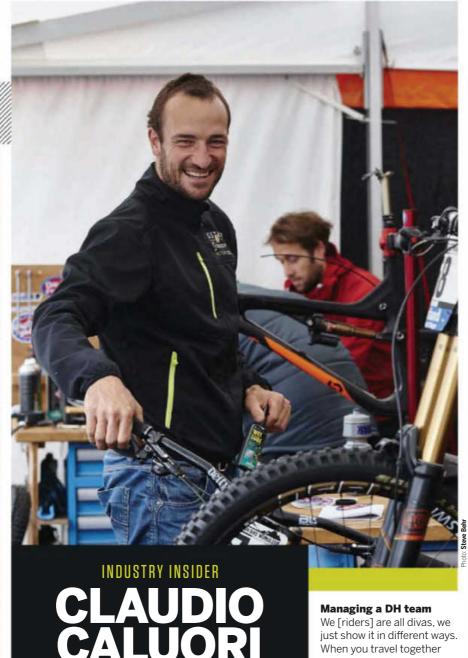
The great outdoors is always inspiring – being there, feeling it and riding through it come rain or shine always gets the brain ticking

At the other end of the scale, I've been lucky so far not to be involved in any awkward or strange shoots. Nothing too odd has come my way but I'm always up for a challenge!

I have a few exciting film projects coming up that I'm working on with various people, but nothing I can talk about.

Storytelling is the key and all will be made clear soon. Aside from that, it's onto the next adventure with my bike and camera.





When he's not keeping Brendan Fairclough and Neko Mulally in line, this former DH racer is best known for his hilarious course previews for Red Bull TV, giving a running commentary as he descends the planet's toughest downhill tracks.

Race fan

I started racing DH in 1996, opened up my own racing team for Tomac in 2008, then started working with Scott in 2009 and I've stayed with them ever since. What I love about racing is that it's still the fastest one down the mountain who wins – there are no judges included. Race

tracks should be fast, flowy, technical and diverse. Most of the World Cup tracks are very good. I founded Velosolutions.com in 2004 and built the World Cup track in Champéry, France, as well as pump tracks all over the world.

Home and away

GSTAAD-SCOTT TEAM MANAGER

My kitchen is my office. I'm considering having a real office where I live, on my uncle's farm in Rhäzüns, Switzerland, but I'm hardly ever there. I love the travelling, but I also love to be at home. It's not easy to leave when the weather is super-nice for riding or the powder is fresh for snowboarding.

We [riders] are all divas, we just show it in different ways. When you travel together for a whole season there'll always be things that don't run smoothly. I have to say though, our two riders are very consistent and good to be with. I'm probably more moody than them!

Funniest course preview

My favourite headcam run was when I sang a Foo Fighters song. I practised it for a full month so I could scream it while I was out of breath. You probably all thought I was a total freak!

Best place to ride

My favourite spot, apart from Gstaad, is at home. Since I'm hardly ever there, I still have plenty of trails to discover.

Tips for budding riders

Ride and have fun, pin it flat-out but stay safe, and don't worry about sponsors – they'll follow when they see how much fun you have doing what you do.

EURO TRIPPING Three uses for our free European



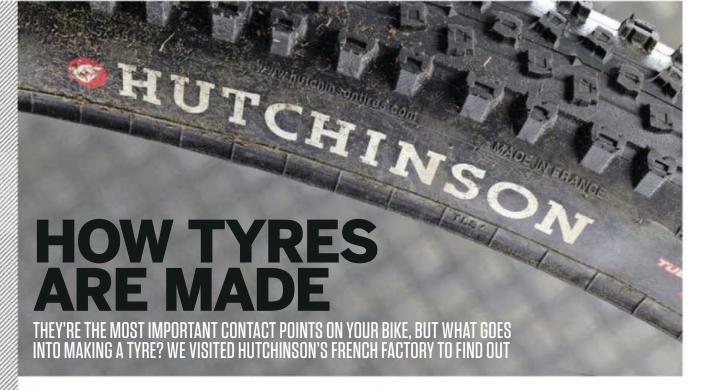
Get organised

Time to get planning! With the information in our guide you'll be able to work out which resorts to visit and how to get there, and when you arrive you won't look like a total newb. As well as highlighting the best trails we've given you a heads-up on the best places to stay, how much money you'll need to have a good time and where to find the best pizza. No matter how big you want to go this summer, we've got you covered!

Play roadtrip roulette
Select a page at random,
pack your bike in the car
and set off on an adventure
right now! Just don't blame us
when your other half wonders
where you've gone and the
first they know about your trip
is a Facebook status update...

Maintain your modesty
When you've been
twitching in your bed,
fantasising about sweaty
exotic adventures with
happy endings, you can use
it as a makeshift tent to hide
your trail boner!





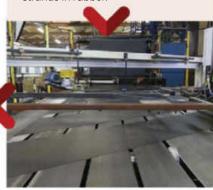
The first step is to mix up the rubber itself. While different bits of the tyre use varying compounds, they all share the same building blocks of natural rubber (from a tree!), synthetic rubber and various additives. These include sulphur, which makes the rubber tougher when heated ('vulcanised'), and carbon black, which adds durability.



The carcass is the body of the tyre. It's made by coating cotton cloth in a layer of rubber to form a sheet. This is then cut diagonally, before being rejoined end to end. The beads of the tyre (the lower edges, which hook into the rim) are made in a similar way, by coating either steel wire or twisted Kevlar strands in rubber.



The carcass is then mounted on a drum. Using lasers to ensure accuracy, the beads are put in place and the carcass is folded over them. Strips of rubber, often of different compounds (eg. harder in the centre for fast rolling, softer on the shoulders for grip) are then laid on top as the drum is spun, before being cut to length and joined. These will form the tread.



Next, the logos are placed on the tyre. As with the rest of the manufacturing process, at Hutchinson this is done by hand. Because it requires so much dexterity to do this accurately and quickly, most of the workers are female. Apparently men are too clumsy! On the plus side, this ensures high demand for new tyres.



The tyre is now one step away from being ready. It's sprayed with a release agent and then placed into a heated mould. Here, an expanding bladder presses the rubber that was applied in step 3 into a pattern on the mould that adds the knobs, sipes (small incisions) and chamfers (sloped edges) that create grip on the trail.



The heat causes a chemical reaction that changes the rubber mixture from soft and squidgy into a much more durable form. When the mould opens, the final product is just a quality check away from being ready to ship to shops and hit the trails. Next time you bemoan the price of new tyres, think about all the work that goes into your rubber!



POWER OR EFFICIENCY?



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MAZDA6: FROM £199 A MONTH + INITIAL RENTAL

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There is one difficult choice though. Mazda3, Mazda6 or Mazda CX-5?

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The official fuel consumption figures in mpg (I/100km) for the Mazda Range: Urban 30.4 (9.3) - 74.3 (3.8), Extra Urban 51.4 (5.5) - 88.3 (3.2), Combined 40.9 (6.9) - 83.1 (3.4). CO₂ emissions (g/km) 161 - 89.

The mpg figures quoted are sourced from official EU-regulated test results obtained through laboratory testing. These are provided for comparability purposes only and may not reflect your actual driving results.

*Mpg and COs figures apply to the Mazda3 Fastback 150ps Diesel Manual. Contract hire offer for business users for Mazda3 105ps SE Diesel, Mazda6 Saloon 150 SE Diesel, Mazda CX-5 165ps 2WD SE-L. Nav orders received between 01.01.2016 and 31.03.2016, subject to availability, status and agreement. Mazda3 figures based on a non-maintenance contract hire package with advance rental of £954, then 36 monthly rentals of £159. Excess miles over contracted mileage of 10,000 over 36 months charged at 11 pence per mile. Mazda6 figures based on a non-maintenance contract hire package with advance rental of £1194, then 36 monthly rentals of £199. Excess miles over contracted mileage of 10,000 over 36 months charged at 11 pence per mile. Mazda6 CX-5 figures based on a non-maintenance contract hire package with advance rental of £1434, then 36 monthly rentals of £239. Excess miles over contracted mileage of 10,000 over 36 months charged at 11.87 pence per mile. Guarantee/Indemnity may be required. Prices exclude VAT at 20%. Prices and details are subject to change without notice. For full specification, wear and tear provisions and other T&Cs, see Mazda Master Agreement and your local dealer. ALD Automotive Ltd., trading as Mazda Contract Hire, Models shown: Mazda6 Saloon 150ps SE Diesel, OTR from £22,295. Model shown features optional Soul Red Metailic paint (£660). Mazda6 Saloon 150ps SE Diesel, OTR from £23,195. Model shown features optional Crystal White Pearlescent paint (£540). On the road prices include 20% VAT, number plates and 3 years' European Roadside Assistance.



THE ONLY THING WE EVER SING ARE SOMS OF COULD'VE BEEN, WE NEVER GOTTO END THE THING WE NEVER COULD BEGIN









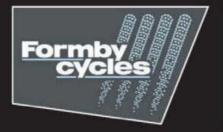














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Specialized Stumpjumper FSR Comp 650B 2016

Bike Cost: £2,199.99 Deposit: £219.99 Number of Months: 36

per month £55.00



GIANT REIGN 27.5 2 MOUNTAIN BIKE 2016

Bike Cost: £2,199.99 Deposit: £219.99 Number of Months: 36

per month £55.00



Cannondale Trail 2 2016

Bike Cost: £999.99 Deposit: £99.99 Number of Months: 24

per month £37.50



Trek X-Caliber 7 2016

Bike Cost: £649.99 Deposit: £64.99 Number of Months: 12

per month £48.75



Whyte T-130S (2016)

Bike Cost: £2,299.99 Deposit: £229.99 Number of Months: 36 per month

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Spend and up 0% APR

£1000 and up 6 Months 12 Months 24 Months 36 Months

£1500 and up









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STAR LETTER

I just read the JMC article in issue 324 and I have to say, it got me! I never knew or met the guy but he sounds like he was fully deserving of the title 'legend'. The article got me thinking about times of old and a couple of friends who are now railing the clouds instead of the dirt with us. It was such a perfectly written piece, it managed to get a big, bearded, full-grown and tattooed man sat on a train reading a bike magazine blubbing away. The strangers surrounding me looked slightly confused but I honestly didn't care! Awesome work guys. LUKE COLEMAN, VIA FACEBOOK

Cheers Luke! We're sure the



author, Paul Smith, a bit of an MTB legend himself (though don't tell him we said that), will be glad to hear you enjoyed reading it, even if it did cause a few tears. Jason McRoy

inspired so many of us in the early years of mountain biking, it's good to hear his legacy lives on.

If your letter gets picked as the Star Letter, you'll receive a pair of DMR Vault pedals worth £99.99, courtesy of Upgrade ww.upgradebikes.co.uk). For full Mountain Biking UK terms and conditions, see p14.



Shock solution

A few weeks back we were setting up our bikes, getting ready to do the Cut Gate ride in the Peaks, when there was a cry of, "Aaargh, my day is over!" One of us, who shall remain nameless, had destroyed the valve on their shock through neglect and it wouldn't hold any air. After some defeatist talk of going home and a bit of head scratching we came up with this solution. Using a plumber's tap, we secured a shock pump to the frame, pumped up the shock and we were off, though my mate's bike looked like something from Mad Max! CLIFFORD RODGER, VIA EMAIL Good work guys! Props to whoever the

engineer was who came up with that little set-up. Good mates always find a solution for the good of the ride!

Bear bait

I've been mountain biking for 20 years but this summer was the first time I've tried the excellent trails in the Tatras Mountains of central Slovakia. My brother-in-law is from that beautiful area and took me out on a ride through a mountainous forest that's home to lynx, wolves and brown bears. I thought he said 15km when I asked how far we'd be riding, but it turned out to be 50km! I couldn't match him for pace on the uphills, and as I frequently



SOCIAL STUFF



BIKERADAR FORUM

www.bikeradar.com/ forums

Any trail building tips?

Don't use branches or logs to build anything - they'll rot and you'll have to do it all again - RockmonkevSC

Don't ride anything straight after building it, because it needs to bed in - buddy_club

Build a hut with a decent coffee machine at the bottom. All trails are much improved with an extra-strong milky coffee! - brianbee



www.facebook.com/ MBUKMag

Urban DH - yea or nay?

As long as they're experienced riders with appropriate protection, it can give the MTB scene a boost - Ben Dawson

At least you're closer to a hospital when the inevitable happens! - Dominic Peake

Urban settings tend to be easier for fans to get to. Fans mean money, money

means development - Gerrard Montgomery

TWITTER

http://twitter.com/ mbukmagazine

What three things would you want to be stranded on a desert island with?

Fatbike, to deal with the sand. Dry lube, to deal with the sand. Spade, to make jumps out of the sand - @ThomasDibley

I'd want to be stranded with ElizabethHurley and that would be sufficient!

- @LunaCycles

A fridge, some beer and a naked lady!

- @HammondMark

lagged behind, every slight noise coming from the undergrowth on either side of the fireroad sent my pulse racing! Slovakia offers hundreds of miles of fantastic forest singletrack and fireroad, and I'll be going back there soon. If ever I do see the indigenous wildlife, I hope it's from a distance and on a downhill stretch of trail!

STE GREGORY. MANCHESTER Trying to outrun a bear or big cat is definitely a good way to improve your downhill speed. Never mind beating the clock – beating the hungry wildlife to safety would be one hell of an incentive to put in a few extra pedal strokes!



Year-round shredding

I visited BikePark Wales for the first time recently and had an awesome day. After a week of rain in the build-up to our trip, we were surprised by how well the trails still rode. On what was going to be the last ride down, we rode Wibbly Wobbly and then moved onto Rim Dinger. I had a 'moment', saved it, then lost it again and ended up with a broken ankle – gutted! We were set to stay over and spend another day there, but instead I spent it getting a couple of screws in my ankle. I'm definitely looking forward to getting fully fit and heading back there. Thanks for giving me something to read and keep me keen while laid up!

SCOTT HAMBRIDGE, VIA FMAII

Trail centres and bike parks have their detractors, but anywhere that provides decent riding in dirty conditions is fine by us. Heal up soon buddy!

The small print

nail your letters and photos to mbuk@bikeradar.com

- The 'Star Photo' winner will receive a Lezyne CNC Dirt Floor Drive pump worth £89.99. ■ The 'That's Gotta Hurt' winner will receive a Lezvne Port-A-Shop toolkit worth £99.99.
- The 'Hardcore Hero' winner will receive an Effetto Mariposa Caffélatex Tubeless Conversion Kit worth £49.99

Turn to p14 for full Mountain Biking UK terms and conditions



324)? Turns out we printed the wrong photo. Oops. The wrist pictured above is James's and the

limb on the right is actually STEVE EDWARDS, who managed to move his elbow three inches up his arm after colliding with a rock in Sri Lanka. Nasty! Sorry about the mix-up, Steve – and enjoy your new toolkit!





SOPHIE CADE takes a pause before one last wintry rur at Hamsterley Forest in County Durham. Apparently sun came out after a day of rain, making it a blinder





MARK GISBY sent us this absolute banger via

















Jungle riding with @jess_greaves and @kimmymcvicker

yesterday at Rainbow Mountain! - Manon Carpenter has escaped the British winter and been

shredding New Zealand





Found this hut earlier #Fuerteventura #castaway - Looks like Manon's not the only pro who's been catching some rays

Sam Pilgrim got us thinking about the summer hols with this pic from the Canary Islands



About to take the biggest pup up Cadair Idris. Into the hail and rain we went!



#wildweather

Rachel Atherton has been keeping it wet and wild in the UK, hiking rather than biking up a Welsh mountain



Just telling the horse how sick my new



this machine! - Taylor Vernon

is so stoked with his 2016 race bike he'll tell anyone who'll stand still long enough to listen!



INSTAGRAM m.com/mbukmagazine



Cotic fan @edmwillis can't wait for spring. Us neither!



@thomasscarth is looking forward to more dusty drifts



FirstRides

FEATURING: Orange Alpine 160 RS // Specialized Stumpjumper FSR Elite // Trek Procaliber 9.7 sL







ORANGE ALPINE 160 RS

FRAME Custom-butted 6061-T6 aluminium, 160mm (6.3in) travel FORK RockShox Pike RCT3 Solo Air, 160mm (6.3in) travel SHOCK RockShox Monarch Plus DebonAir DRIVETRAIN SRAM GX w/ Race Face Turbine cranks and MRP 1x chain guide (1x11) WHEELSET Alex Volar 2.5 rims on Hope Pro 2 EVO hubs, Maxxis Minion DHF 3C EXO (F) and High Roller II EXO (R) 27.5x2in tyres BRAKES SRAM Guide R BAR/STEM Renthal Fatbar, 780mm/Hope AM, 35mm SEATPOST/SADDLE RockShox Reverb Stealth/SDG Falcon WEIGHT 14.08kg (31.04lb), medium size without pedals PRICE £3,900 (complete bike) CONTACT Orange Mountain Bikes www.orangebikes.co.uk

he Alpine 160 is the longest, lowest and slackest it's ever been, but can this simple single-pivot design still cut it in a world of multiple links and bamboozling suspension layouts?

The frame

The Alpine's straight-cut looks and simple suspension won't be to everyone's taste, but cast an eye beyond the no-frills silhouette and things look extremely promising. The front centre (distance from BB to front axle) on the medium bike is a whopping 770mm, the reach a very respectable 446mm, and the kicked-out 64.5-degree head angle should help when pointed downhill.

Details wise, the single suspension pivot means easy maintenance, as does the traditional screw-in BB. The lack of internal cable routing – apart from for the dropper seatpost – makes trail or race pit fixes that bit easier too.

The kit

The extra length of the frame means Orange now spec the

Alpine with a dinky but solidly built 35mm Hope stem. Both suspension units come courtesy of RockShox, work well and are easy to tune. The KS post performed fine for the most part during testing but did get a little sticky at times.

The ride

Even with that stubby stem, the Alpine offers a roomy cockpit that helps make climbing a comfortable affair. The RS isn't particularly rapid on the ascents due to its burly 14kg (31lb) build, but the low-speed compression lever on the shock - which is really easy to access - lets you firm up the back end enough to make things feel efficient. The small 30t chainring helps too. and we never felt held back on the seriously steep, technical climbs of our test route. Keep the pedals turning over rough terrain and you can feel some feedback through the cranks as the single-pivot back end works away, but it's not enough to disrupt flow.

The descents are where the Orange feels most at home though. The poised rider

position, lengthy wheelbase and slack head angle mean the Alpine doesn't shy away as speeds pick up, and things feel nicely stable and confident. Adding a few Bottomless Token volume spacers to the Pike fork helped even out the suspension feel, balancing things nicely front to rear (the Monarch Plus shock comes filled with volume bands to get the back end ramping up nice and early).

In terms of feel, there's definitely something a bit more tangible here when compared to many of the Alpine's competitors. Although the Orange feels well balanced, composed and more than at home being thumped into some ferocious bumps, it maintains a liveliness and feedback-rich feel that makes it one seriously fun bike to ride. ROB

TO RATED

FirstRides

The Alpine rewards patience on the climbs with some serious descending prowess and fun



FirstRides





- ↑ The second generation 650b Stumpy has new geometry and wider wheels
- ◆ The RockShox Pike is a capable fork, but for this price we'd expect the RCT3 version



SPECIALIZED STUMPJUMPER FSR ELITE 650B

FRAME M5 aluminium. 150mm (5.9in) travel FORK RockShox Pike RC Solo Air. 150mm (5.9in) travel SHOCK Fox Float Factory CTD w/ Autosag DRIVETRAIN SRAM X1 (1x11) WHEELSET Roval Traverse wheels, Specialized Butcher Control (F) and Purgatory Control (R) 27.5x2.3in tyres BRAKES Shimano SLX BAR/STEM Specialized, 750mm/Specialized XC, 60mm SEATPOST/SADDLE Specialized Command Post IRcc/Specialized Henge Comp WEIGHT 13.16kg (29.01lb), medium size with pedals PRICE £3,500 (complete bike) **CONTACT** Specialized www.specialized.com

e rated the 26in and 29in wheeled versions of Spesh's hard-hitting trail shredder highly but the first 650b Stumpy FSR failed to hit the spot with our testers, so we were keen to see whether this new incarnation would live up to expectations.

The frame

Specialized's four-bar linkage FSR design delivers 150mm



↑ The Specialized's bridgeless seatstays allow for a super-short 420mm rear end

(5.9in) of grip-biased rear travel, which is controlled by a proprietary RX Trail tuned and Kashima coated Fox shock, with Autosag function for simplified set-up. All the features we'd expect from a modern trail frame are present, including a tapered head tube. ISCG-05 tabs and 142x12mm axle. The rear end is a new design with no seatstay bridge (Spesh say a new linkage and seat tube construction mean the frame is stiff enough without one), which means the chainstays can be kept uber-short, at 420mm.

The kit

SRAM's workhorse X1 1x11 drivetrain and light but wide Roval Traverse wheels fitted with Specialized's Butcher and Purgatory tyres take care of drive and ground contact. The finishing kit is from Spesh too, including their reliable internally routed Command Post dropper,

a decent width bar (750mm) and a little-too-long 60mm stem. The Shimano SLX stoppers are reliable and powerful enough, and front suspension is taken care of by a stiff and plush RockShox Pike RC. We'd have liked to see the more adjustable RCT3 model fitted at this price though.

The ride

'Playful' is the best way to describe the Stumpy. The super-short chainstays and relatively slack 67-degree head angle mean picking the front wheel up over obstacles is easily intuitive and the FSR Elite begs to be wheelied out of every berm. It snaps round tight corners with aplomb, and with the wide (29mm internal) Traverse wheels providing a nice ballooned tyre profile, cornering grip is nearly always available. That said, the Control-carcass tyres do tend to roll if pushed

hard at the lower pressures a wider rim should allow.

While the Specialized is a superbly accomplished bike for general trail riding, it's pushed out of its depth when the going gets steep and fast. The front centre and top tube are relatively short, which causes some front wheel wander on climbs and. combined with the stumpy back end, slight sketchiness at high speeds. While the rear suspension is nice and plush it's also quite linear. We were unable to run the recommended sag because the shock offered little mid to end-stroke support, so we ended up running less sag and keeping the damper in 'trail' mode, compromising smallbump sensitivity slightly. On less extreme trails though, it's a very capable all-rounder and we had fun by the bucketload. ADAM

Not the best on steep ups or downs and rear shock lacks support, but still an impressive trail riding package











SHRED SOME

Sure it's different. Let's face it. It takes some gumption to carve your own trail or pick a line that hasn't been ridden. When it comes to suspension it's easy to follow the crowd. And, while we chose this color to get noticed, consider it a conduit to discovering our true resolve. Manitou wants you to experience our superior performance, tuneability, reliability and service. The award winning, Manitou Mattoc delivers all you want in an all mountain trail tool.

And yes... it is also available in black and white!

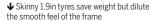
MATIOUT PRO
Weight Lbs / Grams: 4.14/1877 Travel: 140, 150, 160, 170 (26") Spring: DH Air Bottom
Out: Adjustable HBO and Rubber Bumper Steerer: 1.5 Tapered Aluminum Compression
Damping: MC² Rebound Damping: Cartridge TPC Adjustments: Externally Adjustable
Air, Compression (High and Low Speed), Hydraulic Bottom-Out, Rebound Leg Diameter:
34mm Wheel Size: 26", 27.5" Brake: Post Mount 180mm Axle: QR15 Usage: AM, Enduro



FirstRides









TREK PROCALIBER 9.7 SL

FRAME OCLV Mountain Carbon FORK RockShox Reba RL Boost, 100mm (3.9in) travel SHOCK N/A DRIVETRAIN SRAM GX (1x11) WHEELSET Bontrager Mustang Elite Boost wheels, Bontrager XR1 Expert 2.9x2.2in tyres BRAKES Shimano Deore M535 BAR/STEM Bontrager Race Lite, 700mm/Bontrager Elite, 90mm SEATPOST/SADDLE Bontrager Rhythm Elite/Bontrager Evoke 2 WEIGHT 11.07kg (24.4lb), large size without pedals PRICE £2,250 (complete bike) CONTACT Trek Bicycle www.trekbikes.com

an Trek's unique IsoSpeed road bike and cyclo-cross comfort tech translate to full-on mountain bike use? We hit the trails on the new ProCaliber to find out.

The frame

The IsoSpeed coupling replaces the normal fixed joint between top tube and seat tube with a pivot. Add a flattened lower seat tube section, and the top of the seat tube is able to move



↑ The IsoSpeed coupling allows the seat tube to move independently of the rest of the frame

independently of the rest of the frame if the bike hits a bump. 'Boost' rear hub spacing (148x12mm) for extra tracking stiffness, neat cable/hose management and two bottle cages complete a slick and contemporary frame. The smallest size (15.5in) runs on 650b wheels while the other four use 29in wheels to keep size and shape proportional.

The kit

The Boost rear end is matched by a 110x15mm Reba RL Boost fork and RockShox's new OneLoc remote lockout lever. While the asymmetric frame is ready for a twin-ring crankset and front shifter, the 9.7 SL gets a 1x11 SRAM GX set-up. The Shimano Deore brakes are an awkward fit with the shifters but work reliably. The rest of the kit is from Trek's Bontrager subbrand, including a narrow bar/long stem XC cockpit and a surprisingly chunky post and

saddle for a racer. Bonty also supply the narrow Mustang Elite wheels wrapped in minimal-tread XR1 Expert tyres.

The ride

The question everyone asked when we were riding the Trek was "does it [IsoSpeed] work?". The answer is a definite yes, though it only has an effect when seated. Whether you're riding the bike or watching someone else ride it, you can see the seat tube, post and saddle flexing back and forth in relation to the top tube. You can feel this flex taking the edge off smaller bumps and rocky trail chatter too.

You can also notice the seat bouncing underneath you in time with your pedal stroke as soon as revs drop and torque increases up steep climbs or through heavy mud. In some circumstances this pulsing feel seems to help you gain traction and sustain speed, but in others

the bounce made us wish we had a rear lockout.

Despite the chunky chainstays channelling your wattage to the rear wheel and a rock-solid front end adding undiluted shoulder power into the mix, there's a definite softness at full gas compared to a conventional hardtail. The smooth ride also means its inability to deal with mid-size hits can catch you out at first, leaving you stumbling over steps, rocks and roots.

Although they're marked as 2.2in, the tyres are only 1.9in in width, with a harsh ride that undermines the smoothness potential of the frame. Swap to fatter tyres and the added composure combines with the precise 'Boosted' handling and a complete bike weight of just over 11kg to create a surprisingly confident and capable ride that's still rapid to accelerate and flies up climbs with minimum effort. **GUY**

FirstRides

Impact-smoothing super-light racer, but needs fatter tyres and pedalling bounce can be irritating









SIXSIXONE'S NEW KNEE pads sit at the lighter end of the scale, at just 145g a pair, and are designed for the trail and enduro crew. Protection is provided by XRD padding on the knee and top of the shin – a material that's designed to conform to the shape of your legs when moving about on the bike but harden to form a comfortable, protective shell when needed. This is attached to a breathable, strapless sleeve with silicone grippers at the top and bottom. One neat added feature for SixSixOne fans is the ability to attach the pads to the brand's Evo shorts for a bit of extra security.

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MORVÉLO FRESH, TECH AND PADLOCK MTB JERSEYS

SET UP WITH £500 and a few T-shirts in the summer of 2009, UK-based Morvélo are now a successful clothing brand who embrace cycling in all its forms. They've got a load of new MTB designs for 2016, including these long-sleeved jerseys. All three share the same tailored but relaxed fit, with mesh side panels for ventilation, flatlock stitching to avoid chafing and a glasses wipe sewn into the hem. An interesting two-piece cuff design ensures the sleeves stay put over gloves, and all this tech is wrapped up with styling that really hits the mark for us.

£45 Morvélo www.morvelo.com

LEATT DBX ENDURO LITE WP 2.0 HYDRATION PACK

THIS ALL SINGING, all dancing hydration pack from neck brace gurus Leatt looks like it's been engineered to the max! It's packed with everything you could possibly want from a riding pack - a CE level 1 back protector, a holder for a full-face or trail helmet and straps for pads or a jacket, a heat-reflecting bladder pocket so your water doesn't get warm, a reinforced tool pocket and 'AirLine' ventilation to stop you getting a sweaty back. To top it all off, it's totally waterproof. The chest harness with four points of adjustment should ensure a secure fit, the 5l of storage means plenty of room for trail snacks and a 2l bladder is included in the price.

£119.99 Hotlines www.hotlines-uk.com







6D ATB-1 ATTACK FULL-FACE HELMET

WHAT SETS THIS carbon fibre helmet apart from other moto-inspired MTB full-face lids is 6D's 'Omni Directional Suspension' technology. This consists of a series of hourglass-shaped isolation dampers placed between the outer shell and inner liner. As well as helping to absorb impacts, these allow the liner to move within the outer, reducing the amount of energy transferred to the head. Other features include 10 intake ports and three exit vents to help with airflow, a COOLMAX antibacterial liner and emergency-release cheek pads. All this tech weighs in at 1,327g (medium size). There's a choice of three colours and the price rivals other top-of-the-range carbon lids.



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THE MOST DESIRABLE MOUNTAIN BIKES ON THE PLANET 1. #64 Kurt Sorge's Polygon Collosus DH9 WHY IS THIS A SUPERBIKE? The Collosus DH9 is a Red Bull Rampage winning machine that's also been proven on the Downhill World Cup circuit by Mick and Tracey Hannah and their Polygon UR teammates It's designed around 650b wheels but Sorge opts to run stiffer 26in hoops, putting the bottom bracket even closer to the ground As part of Schwalbe's tyre development programme, Kurt's wheels are shod with the latest and potentially greatest rubber, which us punters aren't yet able to buy Breaking the curse We take a look at the bike that helped **Kurt Sorge to a rare second Rampage win** Big mountain freeride is incredibly the Polygon team in the spring - the hard on bikes and bodies. Few Red Colossus DH9 is the Indonesian Bull Rampage winners have been in brand's top-of-the-range downhill/ good enough shape to even attempt freeride bike. The biggest change to defend their titles the following over the old DHX is a step up from year and only two have managed to 26in wheels to 650b (for stock bikes, win the event twice. One of those is at least). Polygon's Development the reigning champ, Kurt Sorge, and Manager Zendy Renan says the this is the bike that helped him break leverage ratio of the twin-link rear end has also been altered to make the the Rampage 'curse'. bike more sensitive over small bumps Freeride collosus and produce a smoother ride. Launched last August - though Sorge While the front triangle is still made had been riding it since he joined from aluminium, the rear end is Words Rachael Gurney Pics Robert Dunnet Mountain Biking UK 57





carbon fibre to keep unsprung mass as low as possible and allow the suspension to react more quickly to changes in surface and give more consistent grip –something imperative to Sorge on the side of a cliff in Utah! Kurt says: "The carbon makes the rear end float over rough terrain and the stiffness improves performance during large hits and cornering."

The bike uses a twin-link 'floating shock' suspension platform, where the rear damper is sandwiched between two triangular links joining the front and rear triangles. This means it's compressed from both ends, reducing pedal bob. All this is packed low in the frame for improved handling. A 'flip chip' at the rearmost shock mount lets you lower the bottom bracket by 3.3mm (361.4-364.7mm) and slacken the head angle by 0.3 degrees (63.1-62.8mm) to create an even more stable bike. Sorge chooses to run 26in wheels in his stock frame, lowering the BB even further.

Sorge's set-up

Kurt sets up his suspension fairly stiff to keep the bike riding higher in its 203mm (8in) of travel and runs three volume reducers in his SR Suntour Rux fork to keep the front end stiff and progressive enough to soak up big hits. The Cane Creek Double Barrel coil shock has a titanium spring from Lite Springs. Sorge says this absorbs small chatter better than a steel coil, helping the bike to track the ground, while the Collosus's progressive rear end deals with heavy landings perfectly.

For Rampage, he used a shock with a slower rebound tune so he wouldn't get bucked off on large hits – an important consideration when you're about to drop in off a cliff! Kurt trusts his best friend, Chris 'The Dude' Woikin, to look after his fork, and for Utah Chris added a new compression damper for a buttery smooth feel.

Sorge relies on Shimano for his stop and go kit, using Saint brakes, cranks and gears for powerful stopping, efficient power transfer and crisp gear changes. Thanks to the MRP chain guide up front, he says he's never dropped a chain. Two Schwalbe Magic Mary tyres keep him stuck to the ground when he most needs it. They're labelled 'First Ride', indicating that he's part of the team of pros handpicked to help Schwalbe develop new rubber and given access to all the latest prototypes.

He's got the talent, the bike and the pro-level kit. All Kurt needs now is a bit of luck to earn his place in the history books with a triple win at Rampage.

THE EQUENTIAL Q

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CONTACT: Polygon www.polygonbikes.com **ALSO LOOK AT:** Scott Gambler 710 £5,099 (complete bike) www.scott-sports.com

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District. Here, the oldest of the sedimentary rocks have created smoother mountains, making for a slightly easier introduction to Lakeland riding. The area is also relatively quick and easy to get to — just come off the M6 at junction 40 and follow the A66 straight to Keswick.

The town is an ideal base to explore the north from because it has plenty of great facilities and a number of good and varied routes right on its doorstep. Not to mention you'll likely come past the famous Tebay Services en route, which makes an ideal (stomach) fuel stop, so when you

THE PERFECT BIKE

A full-suspension trail bike with at least 140mm (5.5in) of travel, a dropper seatpost and strong wheels with tough high-volume tyres is ideal for these parts, where the descents are generally rocky and technical. You still need to get up the big, long hills too though, so it's important to have something that climbs well and isn't too heavy. Mid-size 650b wheels roll over obstacles with ease and provide a good compromise between strength and agility.

do rock up at Keswick you'll be ready and raring to go riding.

Getting rolling

The current and forecast weather conditions should determine the type of ride you head out on, but there's a good range of routes to suit most abilities. For a big, epic ride look no further than the classic Back o' Skiddaw route, which covers a lot of ground, heading north into remote hills for a great 'out there' feeling ride. If you're unsure of your fitness, there's a shorter version of this route. known as Lonscale Fell. It cuts off around 35km and doesn't get so remote, which makes it ideal if the weather's uncertain.

Another great ride that can be ticked off during your weekend is the Skiddaw Summit, an out-and-back route. It may only be 10km long, but the climb takes around two hours and the descent back down is 30 minutes of tough, technical, steep and rocky trails. The views are amazing on a clear day, but it's one to avoid on a windy day or when it's busy with walkers (ie. in summer).

The Borrowdale Bash is an absolute classic of a ride,







THE ROUTES



Back o' Skiddaw This classic route covers more than 50km (31 miles) and heads north into remote hill country for a big ride with a real 'out there' feel.



Lonscale Fell
A shorter (15km/
nine miles), less
remote alternative
to the full Back o'
Skiddaw loop. Ideal
for rainy days and
riders who aren't
used to big epics.



Skiddaw Summit, Another ride well worth ticking off the list, this 10km (six miles) out-andback route goes up and then back down Skiddaw mountain. To be avoided in the summer months.



Borrowdale Bash
This classic
Lakeland ride stays
relatively low,
passing around
Derwentwater, but
still provides some
wonderful views and
fun technical trails
on its 27km (17
miles) journey.



Whinlatter
Trail centre fans can choose between a 7.5km (five miles) blue loop and a red route split into a 10km (six miles) northern loop and a slightly easier 9km (5.5 miles) southern loop.

which passes around Derwent Water. This relatively low-level route still manages to provide some stunning views, as well as some fun and technical trails, making it ideal for the winter months, especially as the popular Cat's Scramble trail won't be so busy with walkers.

And there's more...

If the weather scuppers any hopes of you safely completing a natural ride, or you just want to disengage your brain and ride in relative safety, the trail centre at Whinlatter Forest is just down the road, with good blue and red routes. And if you plan to stay on longer, the central Lakes



aren't far away. Beware though their mix of volcanic and sedimentary rocks produces the highest and craggiest mountains in the National Park. Famous peaks like Scafell Pike and Helvellyn (the highest mountain in England you can ride), classic rides like High Street and mountain passes such as Sticks and Garburn are just a short way away. That said, you've got enough to get on with around Keswick, so it may be best to save the central Lakes for another visit.

This trip is about getting away in the winter, when there's a break in the weather, to take in some stunning scenery and great all-conditions riding. It's a reminder of just how easy it can be to get away from it all, and how rewarding too, both physically and mentally.

There's nowhere we can think of that we prefer to ride or find more rewarding than the Lakes on a beautiful clear winter's day, with the place to ourselves and some good, hard winter miles in our legs. Warm summer days may be fondly remembered, but the right ride in the right place on a cold, crisp day can provide an experience you never realised you were missing. Go on, treat your bike — she's worth it.

INFORMATION

HOW TO GET THERE

The easiest and quickest way, even if coming from the south, is to exit the M6 at Penrith (junction 40) and follow the A66 to Keswick. You'll also pass the excellent Tebay Services this way. The nearest railway station is more than 20 miles away in Windermere.

ACCOMMODATION

There are a number of good places to stay in Keswick, but the cream of the crop includes Amble House B&B, with lovely comfortable rooms, superb breakfasts and a drying room (www.amblehouse.co.uk, 017687 73288). The George Hotel is also good and does great food (www.georgehotelkeswick.co.uk, 017687 72076). If there's a group of you, why not get a place to yourself at either Century Cottage or Century House (www.cumbrian-cottages.co.uk, 01228 599960)? For the more budget conscious, Keswick Youth Hostel is very nice (www.yha.org.uk, 0845 371 9746) or there are three campsites nearby. The favourites are Lanefoot Farm (www.stayinthornthwaite.co.uk, 017687 78097) and Castlerigg Hall (www.castlerigg. co.uk, 017687 74499), which are less formal than the Camping and Caravanning Club site, with Lanefoot allowing open fires. Both have pods, which allow a camping experience right through the autumn (and even winter, for hardier souls).

EATING

Before your ride we recommend a quick visit to Jan's Lakeland Sandwich & Pie Shop to load up on trail food (www.janslss.co.uk, 017687 75220). There may be a cafe on your route but nothing beats a battered but delicious sandwich or pie at the top of the hill while you enjoy a stunning vista. Even better if you remembered to fill a Thermos on a cold day. When rolling back into Keswick at the end of the day, a quick pit stop at the Saddleback Café for some caffeine and cake should provide you with enough energy to get changed and cleaned off before staggering to The George (www.georgehotelkeswick.co.uk, 017687 72076). A few drinks here should be followed by one of their famous handmade cow pies, which come in half and huge portion options.

BIKE SHOPS

Keswick Bikes (www.keswickbikes.co.uk, 017687 73355) and Whinlatter Bikes (www.whinlatterbikes.com, 017687 73940) can help with spares and repairs.

MAPS, BOOKS & GUIDES

Buy a copy of Ordnance Survey's Landranger 90 (Penrith & Keswick) to stick in your pack. For all the routes mentioned and more, have a look at *UK Breaks with Bikes* by Max Darkins (Rough Ride Guide).

USEFUL WEBSITES AND NUMBERS

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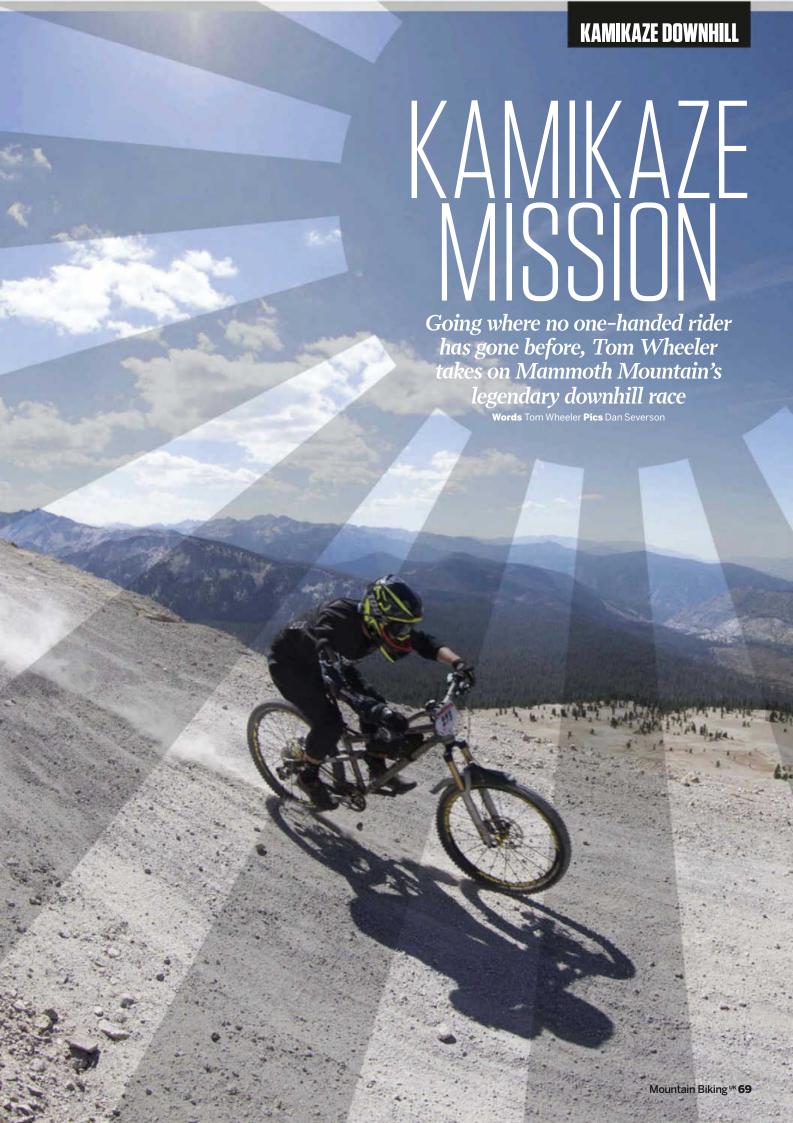
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t's a nerve-racking journey to the top of Mammoth Mountain. I've armoured up, donned Lycra and removed the peak from my helmet — partly to pay homage to the legends of the Kamikaze, but also for the aero advantage. After all, this race is all about going fast! As I get in the gondola, the lift assistant gives me some knuckles and says, "ride fast, take chances". Sitting next to me is Scott Sharples, one of the fastest Australian downhillers of his era. His advice is simple: "Tuck as hard as you can for as long as you can, stay off the brakes and make the turns real wide on the way in!" Easy, right?

Heroes of the Kamikaze

The Kamikaze Downhill is a race with legendary status. The pinnacle of the sport in the late Eighties and early Nineties, it was the event that put DH racing on the map. I've heard newer riders call it glorified road racing because it was all on access roads, but they couldn't be more wrong. The skinsuit-clad warriors who helped sculpt mountain biking reached speeds of up to 60mph here as they put it all on the line, drifting round the turns on bikes that were fully rigid or, later, had minimal suspension travel. Forks were flexy, frame geometry was steep and most riders still used cantilevers with brake boosters or Magura hydraulic rim brakes. This was an age when the roaring Tioga Disk Drive was king – a rear wheel made up of Kevlar string held in place with a plastic cover, designed to improve aerodynamics and comfort, but known for exploding in dramatic fashion!

There were many heroes of the Kamikaze, but the riders who stood out for me were Jason McRoy, John Tomac and Myles Rockwell. When I was six, my brother Rhys attended *MBUK*'s Bike '95 show in London and brought home a poster that showed Jason all tweaked out and was signed, 'To Tom, stay fast little guy!'. This really infused my passion

KAMIKAZE DOWNHILL

THE KAMIKAZE



It feels truly momentous to be stood at the start line where our heroes once stood. Now's the bit we've been waiting for – the speed!

for racing. I worked my way through the Youth and Junior downhill ranks, and then into Expert. Unfortunately that was where my racing career stalled. A high-speed collision with a tree during practice in 2011 left me with a brachial plexus injury. In layman's terms, I'd pulled four of the five nerves out of my neck that controlled my right arm. Coming to terms with life without the ability to use my right arm was tough, but one thing always remained — the desire to ride and race bikes.

Fast-forward four years and I find myself sat at Heathrow Airport waiting to board a flight to Los Angeles with my brother. On the 20th anniversary of our hero Jason's death, we're following in his footsteps and heading out to California, where I'm going to race in the Adaptive category at the relaunched Kamikaze Bike Games. In my luggage is a very special piece of kit - a carbon exoskeleton arm brace with a custom Fox damper and 3D printed hand attachment. It's this 'Exo-Brace' that's allowed me to ride again. I've been working with the prosthetics experts at PDR on a new attachment that'll let me release from the bike in the event of a crash, but it's not quite ready yet so I'll be running my usual 'full commitment' set-up. Everything will be fine, so long as I stay on!

The real deal

We arrive at Mammoth in darkness after a fivehour drive from LA and wake the next morning to beautiful weather and an almighty mountain resort. We know we're up high because the bladders in our hydration packs have blown up like balloons! The schedule is full-on from the start because we've entered the enduro race too, but our main focus is to race the king of downhill courses.

We build up the bikes — we've gone for superlong and stable Mojo/Nicolai GeoMetrons because the Kamikaze is renowned for its insane speed, with a few extra parts on mine so I can ride it





Tom can't use his right arm so he relies on this carbon 'Exo-Brace' to control the bike. It's got a custom Fox shock to soak up the hits, but his hand has to be attached to the barnot ideal if he crashes!

• The Kamikaze Downhill debuted in 1984 and ran until 2001.

The track starts at 11,053ft (twice the height of Ben Nevis) and drops 1,932ft over 3.2 miles. Racers reach speeds of up to 60mph.

• In its heyday the race attracted some legendary names, including Myles Rockwell, John Tomac, Dave Cullinan, Greg Herbold, Philippe Perakis, Jason McRoy and Missy Giove. It was televised and attracted crowds of more than 10,000.

Mammoth was also home to the Reebok Dual Eliminator – a two-up race around the mountain's drifty turns that saw plenty of carnage.

- Rob Naughton won this year's 'Legends' race, held as part of the Kamikaze Bike Games. Pinned on his 29er with his Troy Lee painted, bubble screened helmet in classic Kami style, he beat the likes of Chris Kovarik and Shaun Palmer.
- Leigh Donovan was the fastest woman by a big margin, with the biggest smile too.

hard one-handed (see box on page 72) — and everything's set for five days of riding. As we sign on and receive our number boards it all starts to sink in — we'll soon be bombing down one of the fastest downhill courses in the world!

Staying at 8,000ft is testing enough, but the Kamikaze course starts at just over 11,000ft. I suffer when the air is thin — my right side is less effective than my left, with limited muscle control — but this doesn't stop me getting excited about practice. It takes three lifts to reach the top and the views are out of this world. It feels truly momentous to be stood at the start line where our heroes once stood. Every part of the experience feels epic, but now's the bit we've been waiting for — the speed!

In the danger zone

From the comfort of the sofa back home, internet videos made the track look like a wide fireroad,

SPEED MACHINE

TOM'S MOJO/NICOLAI GEOMETRON

We featured the long-and-slack GeoMetron in issue 322, and its stretched-out wheelbase (1,270mm on the smallest size) made it an obvious choice for the high-speed Kamikaze course.





TWIN BRAKE LEVERS

After trying various combinations, Tom runs his rear lever on top and his front brake below, fixed to an old-school drop-bar mount.



UPSIZED DISCS

Large 200mm floating rotors make it easier for Tom to brake with one hand and help reduce arm pump too.



LONGER LEVER

Tom has extended the remote lever for his Fox DOSS dropper post to make it easier to locate in a hurry amid all the levers on the left-hand side of his bar.



FLIPPED SHIFTER

Gear changes are taken care of by a right-hand SRAM GripShift unit run upside-down on the left side



HEAVIER STEERING

A Hopey steering damper fits into the fork's steerer tube and makes it easier for Tom to lift the front end and control the bike at speed.

KAMIKAZE DOWNHILL



The views from the top are amazing, and if they don't take your breath away, the track certainly will



but in reality it's more of a dirt track, with massive turns that sit 10in deep in dust. Coming in at 40mph with my bike floating around underneath me, the riding isn't like anything I've experienced before. The speed takes a while to adjust to, as does drifting next to a cliff edge!

We quickly realise that success here is all about getting up to speed quickly

and maintaining it. The track is very exposed, so tucking makes a huge difference and the wind plays a huge part in how fast you can go. On a good day the legends would complete the course within four minutes, travelling at up to 6omph. We topped out at 5omph and were way outside the four-minute window.

I find my knees poking out like a MotoGP rider in places just to keep things balanced and avoid a major slide. The changing surface makes things unpredictable, with the bike losing traction in





Coming in at 40mph with my bike floating around underneath me, the riding isn't like anything I've experienced before

places, going light for a split second and then snapping back. But the more I practise, the more comfortable I get with the track. With dropper seatposts, wide bars and 160mm (6.3in) of travel, the riding is plain sailing compared to how it must have been back in the day, but even with a modern bike it feels dangerous. We often share the lift with non-racers here to ride Mammoth's other trails, and when the Kamikaze comes up in conversation their response is always the same: "I stay away from that — the risks are too high."

After a few practice runs, race day is upon us, and I'm the first man down the mountain. With me at the start is fellow Adaptive racer Sean Simonson, in his custom three-wheeled DH machine. Sean is paralysed from the waist down but still loves to charge the Kami course! It's inspiring seeing him attack the track and a true honour to be taking part in this event and overcoming the perceived boundaries of our injuries together. The other racers have been super-supportive and the vibe is something that'll stay with me forever. With Scott Sharples' advice ringing in my ears, my run goes well and I make it down in one piece. So well, in fact, that I come away with the win. Out of all the trophies I've won in 20 years of racing, the Kamikaze Adaptive gold medal is by far my proudest achievement.



DOWNHILL RACING HITS THE HIMALAYAS

India isn't known for its mountain biking, but an emerging scene has gained a foothold on some of the biggest terrain in the world

Words and pics Sarah Frampton





Trucks took the bikes from Manali to Solang, where the state-of-the-art gondola was a real luxury for locals more used to shuttling in pick-ups

Prayer flags and traditional dwellings provided a backdrop you won't find at any other downhill race





cross India, the growing middle-class 'YouTube generation' are embracing more 'western' practices, action sports being one. Their popularity is exploding, and nowhere is this more noticeable than in Manali, a popular hill station in the Himalayan foothills. Unlike the booming ski scene, mountain biking has been a bit of a slow burner, but riders from the Himalayan Mountain Bike Network are determined to put 'India's adventure capital' on the riding map. They worked tirelessly to create the area's first downhill race and we went along to check it out.

Strawberries and sacred cows

Held in Solang, a ski resort 12km north of Manali, the race attracted a small field of competitors from across the globe. On the big day, the clouds parted for long enough to dry the monsoon-soaked track, rogue cows were ushered away and paragliders

took a pause to allow the bikers full access to the mountainside.

The course combined animal tracks with remnants of old horse trails and sections cut by torrential rain, and only required a small amount of fettling to make it flow. The racers traversed strawberry fields, dropped through jungle and picked their way through rock gardens, with a sketchy jump thrown in just for fun. This was no groomed alpine racetrack — it really was just the riders against the mountain.

"We love to ride mountain bikes and chill out, and wanted to share our passion and local knowledge with others," said Vineet Sharma, part of the close team who organised the race. "We're lucky to live in the Himalayas, home to many brilliant mountain bike destinations, some still undiscovered. Sharing these places with people who appreciate the sport has motivated us greatly."

The race was won by Piyush Chavan, 18, from Pune in South India. "I've been

Racers traversed strawberry fields and dropped through jungle, with a sketchy jump thrown in for fun

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TRAIL BLAZER <

MAKING TRACKS In Kashmir

our correspondent Sarah, was tasked by the local government with the challenge of creating a downhill track on Mount Apharwat in the northwestern region of Kashmir. Mountain biking was beginning to take off in nearby Gulmarg (a ski resort in winter) and the area was full of untapped potential. There was just one problem – it was 10km from the notorious Line of Control, a military-controlled area between Pakistan and India. Armed with 20 Burmese refugees and a few primitive tools, the Welshman managed to complete the trail in 18 days. The adventure was epic and the locals were keen to develop the trail network further to attract summer tourists, but the unstable political situation means Kashmir has yet to become the Whistler of India.

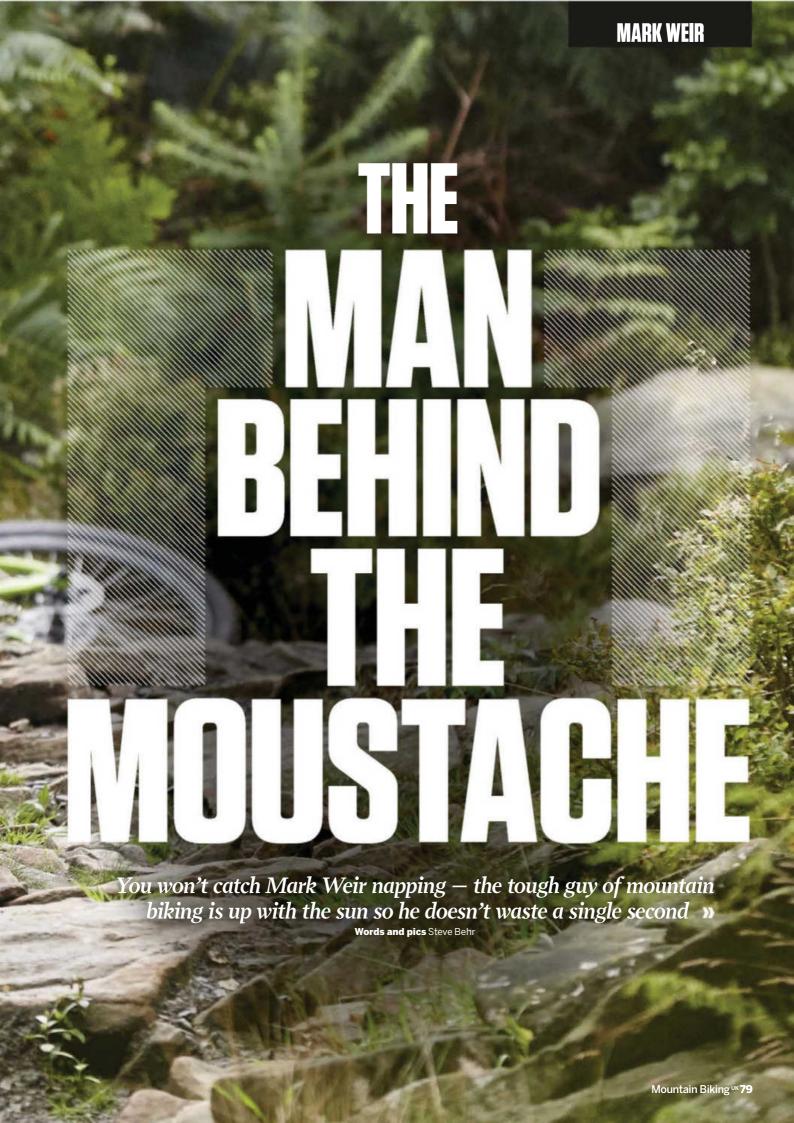
riding for eight years now in a country where road cycling dominates," he told us. "You could only dream of buying a downhill bike a few years ago, but things are changing."

Indeed, the future is looking bright for mountain biking in India, with a small but passionate riding community, more events being organised across the country and competitor numbers rising. "Slowly but steadily," said Piyush, "the thirst for adventure on a bicycle is growing."











ith a reputation as the tough guy of mountain biking, it's a little surprising that the first thing that strikes me about Mark Weir when we catch up at BikePark Wales is his smile. It's on his face and in his eyes, and it's infectious. It's hard not to warm to him immediately. Of course there's all that 'tough guy'

stuff — the wiry frame with muscles everywhere, the bushy biker moustache, the shaved head — but what shines through is that wry, slightly mischievous smile. This is a man who's definitely looking to have fun and live life to the fullest, as fast as he can.

Teen wolf

Mark hails from Novato, a town in northern Marin County, California – as near as damn it to the birthplace of mountain biking. But growing up, football was his first love. "My soccer coach lived next door and saw me kicking my sister when I was about three, so he knew I'd be good at kicking a ball," he jokes. And he was good at it, getting offered a place on a team in Germany when he was 16. His dad didn't let him go though − a decision that shaped his life from then on. "I don't blame him," Mark says. "I was 16 and on a path where he'd have lost his little boy and I'd have came back something else. Maybe different, maybe better, maybe worse, but being away was more then he could handle. My dad is my best friend, he wasn't trying to hold me back. But he forged a path that's made a life for me that I'd never give back."

It wasn't until he was about 20 that Mark picked up a bike. So what was he up to in the intervening years? "Well, ah... no good, really," he says. "I was imperfect, to say the least. UFC (Ultimate Fighting Championship) wasn't around, only handcuffs...

I'm not proud of the time between. Now I'm older, maybe more than my years, I'm just looking to break even, knowing that I got lucky." There's a darker, more complex side to this man that hovers behind the smile, and occasionally shows through.

Mark loved mountain biking once he tried it. It was the perfect thing at the right time, and he threw himself into it and really pushed himself. He started racing in the early '90s — both XC and DH — and by the end of the decade was a highly ranked US downhiller. He did extreme stuff too — one year, he racked up 1,000,000ft of climbing on a freeride bike (a Santa Cruz VP Free).

'The Weirwolf' developed a reputation for going fast and hard, and he became synonymous with the Downieville Classic, a point-to-point race in the middle of nowhere in Northern California. The event consists of a 29-mile XC loop followed by a DH race with a 5,000ft vertical drop, all on the same bike. Mark won the downhill eight times. He often jokes that he "did the best I could do with the skill that I don't have and the will that I do", which is a bit disingenuous really — his skill levels are really high. But there's no denying that his will is also extremely strong.

Racing the sun

There was a major setback in 2009 when Mark's house burned down after the battery in one of his radio-controlled cars — a passion he's shared with his dad from an early age — caught fire while recharging in his garage. Most of his cycling memorabilia and possessions were destroyed, but with the help of his friends he's rebuilt his home and lives there with his wife and young son, working for WTB, an institution he's been connected with for two decades. The job description on his business card reads 'Tough Guy'. Indeed. He loves most things on wheels and shooting guns, and describes himself as



RIDE LIKE WEIR THE CITTY

"The foot-on slide turn is a gift feeling I want every ride," says Mark. "A true cutty is done off the brakes and drifting with pure commitment – like a ski turn, or a surfer slashing a wave. It's all about hucking earth." Leading us to one of BikePark Wales's many switchbacks, he demonstrates this trademark move.

"Say you overcommitted on the previous switchback and as a result you're running a square line at the next one. Knowing that most switches have a long catch, I'll ride into it front heavy and grab a fistful of rear brake.

The hardest part is feeling the difference between slide and grip. The best scenario is to start drifting and get off the brakes as soon as you lose traction. Then get your weight back towards the rear wheel – this gives you traction again. It's all in the hips.

"The Aussies have perfected this move – Bryn Atkinson is the cutty king! I like to say 'cutty hard, cutty often.' You should use every second to make your ride better. Even if it results in broken parts it's worth perfecting. The difference will be clear when it becomes intuitive."





a redneck. Maybe, but there's greater depth here — a searching soul, an appreciation of nature and philosophy, and a lust for life.

We get to talking about photography, and Mark shows me a collection of photos on his phone. They look like your typical Marin sunset pics, until he points out that they're sunrise pics. It transpires that in the summer he mostly gets up at around 3.30am and heads to the top of a nearby hill to watch the sun come up. How come?

"I hate sleep," says Mark. "When there's more light than dark I want to be there. The hill behind my house is 1,987ft (606m). It's a four-mile climb, with three-and-a-half miles of flat trail and road to get there. I leave depending on the sun, the rule being that I have to see the dawn light before it lifts from the horizon. Fall [autumn] is easy — there's a late lift at 6.30am, or later with nice weather. Summer is its own battle — a 3am wake-up isn't easy when your friends pour heavy drinks and don't seem to care about this sun-chasing thing!

"To get to the top of this hill it takes about an hour-and-a-quarter with a good 'getting after it' tempo. So I get up early, and it's the gift that keeps giving. I keep busy all day — I don't nap. I don't want to waste my time. I need to keep going and I can't afford to miss a second. The sunrise has given me more than anything on the bike has. It's shown me that your moment in the sun can change everyone around you. My wife always said to me, 'Your spark can become a flame and change everything...' Truth be told, that was after I burned my house down. I'd like to think it means more than that," he smiles wryly.

There was another setback last year when Mark fractured his pelvis in a freak accident. He was moving a fallen tree from a trail with friends when it fell on him, putting him in a wheelchair for several months. "That was a shit fight!" he says. "When you can't wipe your own bum things change. It's hard to explain, but the wife I'm supposed to protect was having to protect me. She's such a strong woman, I'm so lucky. I've had

some really bad things happen to me, with bikes and stupidity. The things that changed me, I'm sad to say, were discovered through physical damage. I hope I can teach my son another way."

The Godfather

Mark is often referred to as the 'godfather of all-mountain riding', with the title of 'godfather of enduro' seeming to belong to Fred Glo, the French race organiser. "Enduro is something we've always done, the events just changed," he observes. "Fred's events, the Megavalanche in France and Downieville in the US, they all evolved to give us enduro."

"US enduro is different to European enduro though," he adds. "It's dominated by lungs rather than skill. I much prefer the European version. As far as the Enduro World Series is concerned, we needed a stage and we got it. As for what happens with it, we'll see. It'll become something that extracts

the best and weeds out the rest. You can't be the best without this."

Mark is no longer looking to be the best, if indeed he ever was. He's getting more philosophical with age. "Like I said, I'm just looking to break even, to pick my fights, if you like. It's not that old guys get slow, life just catches up. With no family and no life other than your own you could be pay-cheque fast. But who'd want you? You have no past if you don't build the future — that's something I live by."

Make no mistake, Mark is still pretty damn fast, up and down, and but what's more important is that he's smiling all the way.







GETTING WILD IN WALES EPIC CYMRU

Mark was in the UK to take part in the inaugural Epic Cymru, a five-day mountain bike stage race in South Wales. His WTB/Cannondale teammate Jason Moeschler travelled with him, and having announced beforehand that he was here to win, duly did. Mark, on the other hand, relaxed and enjoyed himself. "It was a great experience with great people!" he enthuses, admitting: "I suffered 'cos I didn't know what to expect. The trails were great, they just seemed to all go uphill! High-posters activate!" This year's event takes place from 30 July to 3 August – check out www.epiccymru.com for details.

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* * * * * GOOD: It'll do the job and do it well

* * * * * BELOW AVERAGE: Flawed in some way

* * * * *

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Detailed product check in the MBUK workshop

Strip and rebuild, checking for potential problems and improvements

Hit the trails... hard!

Test in real riding conditions till we know everything there is to

know about the product

Re-test product with another tester

OUR TEST TEAM

Our Technical Editor in Chief, Rob Weaver, gets new products in as soon as they're available and coordinates all the testing through our vastly experienced band of

reviewers. Our main bike tester, Guy Kesteven, has ridden nearly 3,000 bikes over the past 26 years.

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Relevant

Fair

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With two decades of riding and racing experience, Rob knows what works and what doesn't



Our ultra-experienced northern test engine is the ultimate exposer of kit that doesn't measure up



Our Features Editor is back in the UK after seven years in the Alps and has a reputation for wrecking bikes



Seb's passion for engineering helps him pick products apart, and he's no slouch on the race track either



Short and fast, pinned or binned, Art Editor Jimmer has been testing kit longer than he'll happily admit to



Our newest tester is an enduro loving upside-down face who spends more time on two wheels than two feet.



£289.99 (six-cell battery) i-ride www.i-ride.co.uk

GEMINI'S NEW TRIPLE-HEADED

light looks like a gimmick but sitting three of their neat, reliable DUO lights side by side in one combined head unit actually works incredibly well on the trail.

The six-LED output is quite simply the best we've used in terms of practical power and balance. Impressively broad corner coverage blends with 'far as you can see' distance throw for speed work and a huge amount of front and centre fill for accurately assessing techy trails

even at half power. The wireless remote comes ready synced to toggle between 4,000, 1,800 and 600 lumens, and each mode can also be programmed in 10 per cent increments. There's even a 'dip' button for riding in traffic.

Remaining battery life is indicated by power button colour change and if 1hr 40mins on full chat isn't enough, the eight-cell battery adds 30mins for £10 more. The long (123mm), low head unit means bike computers will need shifting and bulkier bar

clamps may require the use of DIY height spacers, but there's no movement even on hardcore trails. The bag battery mounts easily on most frames, the price and 479g weight are competitive for its power and features, and Gemini reliability has always been excellent too. **GUY**

MBUK

Potential fit faff, but truly brilliant user-friendly mega light at a reasonable weight and price

* * * * *

SHRED Soaza Dirt goggles

€65.99 SHRED Optics www.shredoptics.com

THESE GOGGLES FROM SHRED Optics certainly stand out in this bright green 'Zerozero' colourway. The lenses are easy to change, offer a more than adequate field of vision and have lugs so tear-offs can be fitted if needed. There's sufficient foam padding to make the fit relatively comfortable and secure, but the stiffness of the frame meant the Soaza Dirts didn't conform to our faces as well as some other goggles. Ventilation is satisfactory – they don't fog up except on uphill slogs and during sustained periods of rain. The loud styling may not be to everyone's taste though, and the price tag is rather steep. **ADAM**







Fox Float X2 rear shock

£499 Mojo Suspension www.mojo.co.uk

AIR-SPRUNG SHOCKS used to be a rare sight on the DH World Cup circuit, but the introduction of Fox's X2 has helped change this. It was ridden to numerous podiums in 2015 and used by Aaron Gwin to win the series title. So, just how good is it?

The X2 uses a twin-tube design (proven in the MTB world by the likes of Öhlins and Cane Creek) with four-way damping adjustment. Fine tuning requires tools – a 6mm Allen key for the high-speed compression (which is controlled by Fox's Rod Valve System and offers 24 clicks of adjustment) and rebound damping, and a 3mm Allen key for the low-speed compression and rebound. The spring curve

can be altered with volume spacers and there are six shock lengths on offer, though the diameter of the X2's EVOL air can means it won't fit all frames.

Bolted to a Pivot Phoenix DH bike, we were surprised by how much of a difference the X2 made in terms of grip and composure. Riding it back to back with its coil-sprung equivalent, the DHX2, it was clear that the air shock had the edge in certain scenarios. Over harsh, repetitive braking bumps it properly takes the edge off the chunder, and it's more than comfortable tackling the big hits too. It's through rough high-speed corners that it really impresses though, remaining composed and keeping our feet

glued to the pedals and our tyres gripping the trail, without numbing too much of the feedback through the bike.
Ultimately, the X2 gave us more confidence to attack the trail, which is a big part of the battle.
But what of that old 'air shocks can't handle heat' issue? We had no problems at all with damping consistency on long runs.

The X2 is designed for enduro as well as DH use, so a variety of testers tried it on a number of different trail bikes, helping us to really get the measure of this shock. While some may wonder if all that tunability is necessary, the X2's adjustments are properly ride-altering, which meant we were able to work

around some less-than-desirable ride characteristics on certain suspension platforms. This is by no means a five-minute job, but if you've got the patience the results really do pay off. The only downside is that you need two Allen keys to do this on the trail.

Overall, our testers were all in agreement that this supple, highly tunable bump-eating monster of a shock is a force to be reckoned with, delivering impeccably measured control in some seriously nasty situations. ROB

A seriously impressive, confidence inspiring damper that helps flatten out even the harshest of repetitive hits



PRODUCT NEWS



Looking fly

Bell already make camera mounts for a number of their lids. Now they've gone a step further and integrated a camera into the helmet itself. And this is no ordinary action snapper – they've teamed up with 360fly, makers of a small, spherical camera that captures 360-degree footage in glorious 4K resolution. Available on the Super 2R enduro lid, the camera is sunk into the helmet's shell, limiting bulk. We've yet to hear what this set-up will set you back – keep an eye on www.zyro.co.uk for updates.

Foxed up

Big news from YT Industries – their top-end enduro and DH bikes will use Fox forks and shocks for 2016. The Capra CF Pro Race and CF Pro now come with Fox's acclaimed Float 36 fork (with travel boosted from 160mm to 180mm on the Pro Race) and Float X2 shock. The Tues CF Pro gains the superb Float 40 up front and, again, the X2 at the rear. For the full lowdown, check out www.yt-industries.com.



Yo!

After a successful Kickstarter campaign, it's great to see Fat Chance bikes back in production. The first new models to drop in 15 years will sport 650b or 29in wheels and both will bear the famous 'Yo Eddy' name. The 650b frame is designed around a 130mm fork, while the 29er is optimised for a 120mm fork. Both will cost \$1,699 (roughly £1,200) and there's talk of selling complete

bikes soon. Head over to www.fatchance.bike for more info.





Gravity GRID bar and stem

£59.95 (bar), £69.95 (stem) Windwave www.windwave.co.uk

THE GRID BAR is a whopping 800mm wide (a 760mm version is also available) but has laser-etched cut marks that make it easy to lop up to 66mm from either side if you fancy fitting through some tighter gaps in the trees. Touting eight degrees of backsweep and five degrees of upsweep, it's a decent shape and feels natural on the trail. It's only available with a 20mm rise and 35mm clamp diameter though, and at 316g it's definitely built to take some abuse.

The counterpart GRID stem comes in stubby 35mm and

50mm lengths, with a sixdegree rise and 35mm bar clamp. Weighing 167g (for the 50mm variant), it complements the bar's DH credentials.

On the bike, the Gravity bar and stem combo is pretty stiff, making it feel like you're running a few more psi than normal in your suspension fork. This translates to a more precise ride – you feel very connected to the front of the bike – but we found it could also cause arm and hand fatigue on extended descents. ALEX





Alpinestars Outrider shorts

£109.99 i-ride www.i-ride.co.uk

AT JUST UNDER £110 these water-resistant shorts aren't cheap, but they deal with damp British conditions well and come with a padded liner.

Two Velcro tabs at the waist let you tailor the fit, and the zipped and twin-poppered front closure keeps things secure. The two hip pockets would be handy if they were zipped, but they're not, making them almost redundant when riding. There's a zipped pocket lower down the thigh though, which will take lighter items.

Thanks to the taped seams and the waterproof panel through the crotch and back, we found the Outriders did a good job of keeping the worst of the spray and splatter out, even on really boggy days in the saddle. **ROB**



Endura Wms SingleTrack jacket

£99.99 Endura www.endura.co.uk

AT FIRST glance this women's waterproof looks like it'll be of the warmer (read 'sweatier') variety, but the reality is quite different. On one of our wettest rides this winter, this slim-fitting jacket breathed well and kept us dry for the duration. It balances temperature well, so we stayed warm when we had to stop for other riders to fix mechanicals but didn't overheat when pedalling.

A rollaway hood, dropped hem, generous sleeve length, underarm vents and neat chest pocket with media port complete the features list. The only thing that lets this jacket down is the absence of waterproof taped zips – there's one on the chest pocket but that's it. RACHAEL







Bliss ARG Vertical Extended knee pads

AS THE NAME suggests, the ARG Extended knee pads offer a bit more coverage than most, stretching down and covering at least half the shin as well as the knee. Bliss have opted to use just one Velcro strap, around the upper opening. Although the sleeve itself fits tightly, we had problems with the top of the pad slipping down. We found the best way to secure them in

cuff up and over the top of the calf, suggesting that a lower rather than upper strap could be the way forward here.

When it comes to pedalling comfort, the ARGs don't chafe or slip down even when caked in mud and soaked right through. We always felt well protected, and the extra length is handy for pedal strikes. ROB

MBUK * * * * *









place was to hook the bottom

£129.99 Zyro www.zyro.co.uk

GIRO'S NEW FLAGSHIP trail

helmet comes packed with some great practical and safety features. At the top of the list is the MIPS brain protection system - a thin plastic layer between the liner and pads, designed to reduce rotational forces in the event of an angled impact. This goes unnoticed when riding and adds little extra weight to the Montaro, which tips the scales at 378g. The dropped rear boosts safety further.

The lengthy peak can be pushed up out of your eye line, leaving enough space below to sit a pair of goggles. We tried the Montaro with a variety of glasses too, and had no fit issues with any of them. There's also a camera/light mount that snaps into the central vent up top. Ours was fiddly to fit but secure enough once in place, yet tricky to then remove again.

Giro's proven Roc Loc cradle makes it easy to get the fit right, the minimal padding provides a deceptive amount of comfort and the 16 vents meant we had no issues with overheating. We reckon the Montaro is one of the best looking trail lids out there too. ROB

Giro's latest lid looks great, feels good and is packed with some really well-considered features











PRODUCT NEWS

Continued



Something special

If mass-produced carbon trail bikes aren't quite your thing, Starling Cycles are well worth checking out. Joe, the man behind Starling, makes the frames in a workshop behind his house and will happily sort custom geometry for those who have specific requirements, from the finest True Temper Supertherm and Columbus Zona steel tubing. Our sample Starling has just landed with us, so keep an eye out for a review soon. Until then, check out www.facebook.com/starlingcycles.

One-stop shop

We never understood why DT Swiss split their UK distribution between two companies, selling their suspension and wheels through Hotlines, but most of their parts (spokes, hubs, nipples, etc) through Madison. Complicated, eh? This year though, all things DT are back under one roof with Madison. We've long been a fan of DT's wheels, and it's great to see they're already offering Boost wheelsets from £269. Check out www.madison. co.uk for the full line-up.



Oops

With all the words we pack into the mag each month we'll inevitably make the odd mistake. Last issue we featured the Early Rider Belter 20in Trail 3S in our Out Front section. While we said it was a singlespeed, it does in fact have a three-speed internal gear hub. Other than this small whoopsie, the rest of the details were correct. For all the info on the Belter 20in and Early Rider's other bikes, take a look at www.fisheroutdoor.co.uk.



7iDP M1 full-face helmet

£69.99 Decade Europe www.decade-europe.com

THE M1 IS UK-based 7iDP's first foray into the world of full-face lids. With a lightweight polycarbonate shell, the medium size weighs 890g, making it quite the featherweight. Seventeen mesh-backed vents mean it breathes surprisingly well too, and the front opening is fairly large to increase the field of vision and allow for easy integration with a variety of goggle shapes. The flexible and detachable peak offers plenty of

adjustment. We'd rather see a double D-ring closure in place of the plastic buckle though.

Although our sample was a reasonable fit, the padding is sufficient rather than lavish, so the helmet moved about slightly on rougher trails. There wasn't enough movement to cause real concern, and at no point did it become uncomfortable or cause any soreness, but a bit more padding in certain areas would help. The cheek pads can be

pulled out for cleaning and speedy helmet removal in emergencies.

Given the reasonable price and some features normally found on more expensive brain boxes, you could do far worse than to wrap your head in an M1. ADAM

MBUK

Great value, lightweight full-face with plenty of features, but double check sizing to ensure a secure fit



Madison Addict Storm waterproof jacket

£139.99 Madison www.madison.co.uk

MADISON DESIGNED THEIR

Addict Storm jacket to take on anything the British weather can throw at it, and so far it's done just that. It's made from a hard wearing, robust fabric that, although great at keeping the weather out, does mean it heats up quite quickly if it's not Baltic out. There are two big frontfacing vents that do help with airflow, but this is scuppered somewhat when wearing a pack.

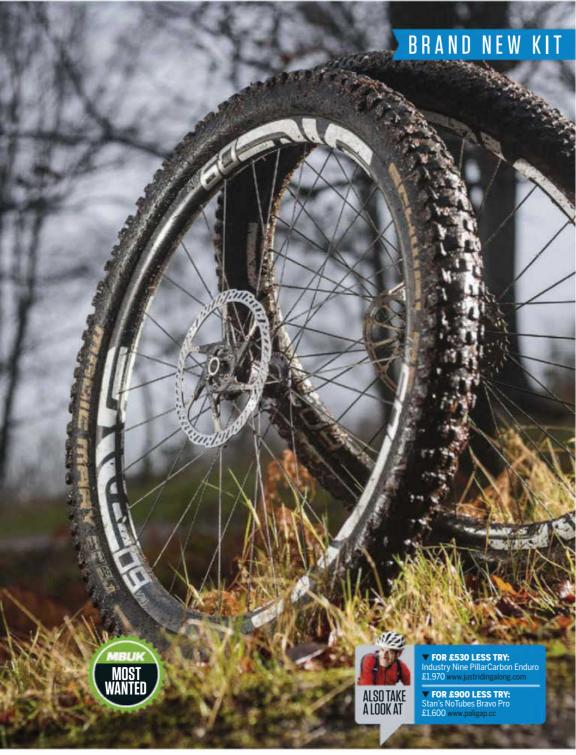
The four zipped pockets are waterproof and handy for stashing essentials in. There's

also a detachable hood that'll fit comfortably over a lid should things get really grim. Velcro cuffs and a drawstring hem mean you can properly batten down the hatches too.

In serious downpours the Addict Storm does an impressive job of keeping the rain out, but its heavy construction means it's better suited to uplift use than long days pedalling, especially if it's mild out. **ROB**







ENVE M Series 60 Forty/HV

£2,500 Saddleback www.saddleback.co.uk

THERE'S ONLY ONE question anyone asks about wheels that cost this much and that's "are they worth it?" The short answer is, if you can afford them, yes.

At 1,630g (710g front, 920g rear) they're noticeably light and the five-degree lag of the Chris King hubs underlines their ego boosting responsiveness. The slick, long-lived bearings redefine the concept of smooth spin compared to standard cartridge-bearing hubs too.

The 26mm internal width of these HV (High Volume) rims

supports high grip, low pressure 2.3-2.4in tyres well, but they're not so broad that they add rolling or turning drag. They've stayed straight and unscathed through an extended boulderinfested test period too, which is lucky because the hidden nipples make adjustment a pain. If you do properly bust them, you're covered by a five-year warranty or half-price replacement scheme.

What you really need to know, though, is that these wheels put a permanent tailwind into your

pedalling, give vividly high-def trail feedback and the authority and accuracy to make the most of it. The pre-sealed tubeless set-up is very secure even at sub-20psi pressures too, which helps offset their sometimes unforgiving big-hit stiffness. For aggressive trail riding these are pretty much perfect. GUY

Exclusively expensive, but they offer a bike-changing balance of precision, responsiveness and surefooted speed

* * * * *





THE SMALL STUFF B BITS AND PIECES



PEDRO'S **Vise Whip**

2pure www.2pure.co.uk

Pedro's chain whip replacement isn't cheap but makes removing your cassette much easier, with less chance of skinning knuckles. The jaws can be adjusted to clamp 11 to 23t sprockets, and once clamped in place the Vise Whip provides a solid handle to pull against. ROB













HUNSLET CHAIN OIL

£3.99 (10ml) Hunslet www.hunslet.cc

This low-viscosity lube keeps your transmission running smoothly and doesn't leave any gunky residue. Like other thin lubes, you need to reapply it after washing, but the small bottle stretches a long way. ROB













CAPSULAR **P1 CASE**

£19.99 Capsular

www.capsular.myshopify.com

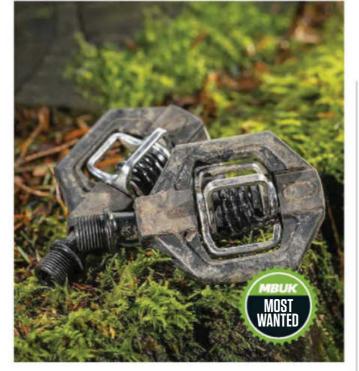
Designed to keep your smartphone safe from dust, moisture and crashes, this hardshell case has recessed spaces to fit a key, coins, notes and a few cards. The silicone fins do a good job of securing your phone and absorb shocks too. It won't fit every phone though. JAMER











CrankBrothers Candy 1 pedals

£47.99 Extra UK www.extrauk.co.uk

THE CHEAPEST OF the six Candy models and the only ones to use a composite body, the 279g Candy 1s are actually lighter than the two pedals above them in the line-up. They come with the same brass cleats used across the CrankBrothers range. which can be swapped to provide a 15 or 20-degree release angle.

With carbon-soled XC style shoes, the contact between the slippery sole and composite pedal is more stable and less skatey than with the pricier

aluminium Candys. This makes for a more solid feel underfoot without affecting the float CrankBros are famed for.

Clipping in and out doesn't require as much effort as with Shimano pedals, and can be done even when they're properly swamped with mud. During months of hard use, our test pedals have shrugged off numerous rock strikes and are still spinning smoothly. ROB





ODI Elite Motion Lock-On grips

£22.99 Ison Distribution

www.ison-distribution.com

ODI'S NEW ELITE Series grips use a single lock-on clamp with a larger than usual 3mm Allen bolt and slimmed down, rounded profile.

While the 30mm diameter is slim and feedback very clear, offset grip thickness over the inner sleeve puts padding where it matters so they don't bruise your palms when you're battering over boulders. The soft compound, high grip knurled pattern varies across the surface for a softer feel while the end flange is made from a harder rubber compound for durability and hand support.

There are grid detailed, larger diameter Flow versions too, but either way these are brilliant - if pricey - performance grips. **GUY**



Scott Soldier knee pads



£49.99 Scott Sports www.scott-sports.com

SCOTT'S SOLDIER KNEE

pads are sleek, strapless affairs targeted at all-day trail riding. There's silicone gripper on the inside of the top and bottom openings to help keep them in place, and a pliable front knee guard and additional foam side protectors to ward off the knocks.

The pads' lightweight (360g for the pair), breathable stretch mesh construction and pre-curved shape make them immensely comfortable. Unfortunately, this comes at the cost of security - we found

they just wouldn't stay in place on the trail and had to make constant re-adjustments. When we did have an inadvertent mud-cuddle, the Soldiers moved so much that our knees were left unprotected.

They may have the smart looks and durable build typical of Scott products, and the pricing is reasonable too, but the performance of these pads is disappointing from a company known for producing well-accomplished kit. ADAM









BRAND NEW KIT



Race Face Khyber women's shorts

£76.95 Silverfish www.silverfish-uk.com

RACE FACE CALL these shorts 'the little black dress of downhill' and we'd have to agree. Their simple style won't go out of fashion in a hurry and they're hard-wearing enough to put up with all the trail parties you're likely to attend!

They're pricey for shorts with no liner included and the tough 'Tweedster' fabric makes them rather heavy and a tad bulky,

but their hardiness means you should get plenty of use out of them. The legs end just below the knee, the waistband now covers more of the lower back and six pockets offer plenty of storage. Pedalling with the upper pockets full is somewhat uncomfortable though, due to the stiff fabric. RACHAEL











£119.99 Madison www.madison.co.uk

AS WELL AS keeping your back protected, this vest houses two small, soft flasks in stash pockets on the hips to help quench your thirst.

First things first, the soft mesh construction is extremely comfortable, the off-centre zip stays out of the way and doesn't irritate, and the flexible Armourgel panel at the rear goes almost unnoticed. The snug fit means we never had any issues with the back protector shifting around, and it's thin enough that you can wear a pack over the top.

While we like the idea of combining protection with hydration, the execution doesn't quite cut it here. Though the soft hip flasks stay put when climbing or cruising on more sedate trails, as soon as you start moving about the bike they quickly eject from the vest, especially when fairly full. Emptying them a little and really shoving them into the pockets does help a bit, but they were still spat out when we hit a short undulating section at speed. Thankfully the tight hem on our jacket caught them, but if we'd just been wearing a jersey we'd have lost both flasks early into the first ride. ROB

A really comfy way to protect your back. The integrated flasks are a nice idea but don't stay put for long









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BIKE COMPUTERS

Why upgrade...?

"Bike computers offer loads of useful functions, from basic speed and distance info to advanced training data Some even let you map and unload your rides. We've tested a diverse spectrum to help find the best one for you.





Topeak PanoComputer

Extra UK www.extrauk.co.uk

SO GOOD... A single Bluetooth sensor detects both cadence and speed, making Topeak's offering relatively painless to set up. It displays up to five metrics simultaneously, and it's easy to toggle through the other data. An optional smartphone app adds GPS tracking, without shortening the computer's superb battery life.

NO GOOD... It's pricey for what's essentially a non-GPS computer without a heart-rate monitor (£49.99 extra). GPS aside, Topeak's app offers little advantage over Strava other than cadence data. The wheel magnet can get dislodged on rough ground, and the mount is slightly flimsy.

MBUK * * * *



Sigma ROX 6.0/CAD

Todays Cyclist www.todayscyclist.co.uk

SO GOOD... The ROX 6.0/CAD lacks GPS but offers a huge range of other features - great for those who want to train hard but don't feel the need to brag on social media afterwards. The included heart-rate, cadence and speed sensors connect wirelessly with little faff. Digital set-up is relatively painless too thanks to clear instructions. Five buttons make it simple to scroll between readings, which include heart-rate intensity zone and altitude profiles. The lap function stores readings for heart rate, speed and cadence (among other data) for up to 99 laps. NO GOOD... The Sigma computer is expensive for a non-GPS unit.







CicloSport CM 109

Hotlines www.hotlines-uk.com

so good... The CM 109 sits at the cheapest end of the bike computer spectrum but still offers help when navigating. The wired spoke-magnet sensor records your current speed and total and trip distances. You can zero the trip distance independently of the total distance to measure individual stages and ensure you don't overrun a leg of your route and miss an important landmark or junction. The guarter-turn base held our test sample securely while riding over rough terrain.

NO GOOD... Initial set-up is confusing, but it's otherwise hard to fault for the price.











CatEve Stealth evo+

Zyro www.zyro.co.uk

so good... Coming complete with a heart-rate monitor and speed and cadence sensors, the CatEye represents pretty good value for a GPS unit. ANT+ technology connects everything wirelessly and allows additional sensors such as power meters to be added. Average and maximum values for heart rate, speed and cadence are recorded – great for fitness fans. It's easy to reset the two trip meters, and the screen is big and clear. The mount fits on both 31.8mm and 35mm handlebars too.

NO GOOD... It's not cheap, the single main button makes scrolling through functions tedious and it doesn't count calories.





Lezvne Mini GPS

Upgrade Bikes www.upgradebikes.co.uk

SO GOOD... If you're a technophobe or a weight weenie this could be the GPS unit for you. It weighs just 36g including the mount and set-up faff is minimal. Just strap it to your bar (31.8mm or 35mm) with the included O-rings and hit the trails. It stays put over the roughest terrain, and provides all the key data, if you don't need heart-rate info.

NO GOOD... It's a little frustrating that you can only toggle through the metrics in one direction, and you have to go into the menu to reset the trip readings. The small screen makes it hard to see the data while riding off-road.

MBUK * * * *



Garmin Edge 520

Madison www.madison.co.uk

SO GOOD... This feature-laden GPS unit uses GLONASS satellites to improve signal reliability. You can upload your ride to Garmin Connect, which is easily linked to your Strava account. Add Strava live segments and the Edge 520 will display them as you ride them. The many options and features are easy to navigate, and up to 10 data fields can be displayed simultaneously. The 31.8mm bar mount is sturdy enough for proper MTBing too

NO GOOD... It's pricey. The base map is fairly spartan too, though free third-party alternatives are available.

MBUK * * * * *



SH-AM9 SPD £99.99

ALREADY A WORLD CUP AND WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WINNER, THE NEW AM9 SPD SHOE IS LIGHTER, HAS MORE GRIP AND GIVES EVEN BETTER CONTROL THAN ITS PREDECESSOR.



SH-AM7 FLAT £89.99



SH-AM5 SPD £69.99



SH-AM5G SPD £69.99

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ROB'S CANNONDALE HABIT 2

£3,499.99 Cannondale www.cannondale.com



l've ridden a few Cannondales over the years, some good and, well... some not so good. After a couple of rides on the Habit I'm relieved to say that it falls

into the former of the two categories. In fact, it's bloody ace fun!

I wasn't quite sure what I was in for when I first hit the trails, but the Cannondale's slender lines and limited travel are seriously deceiving. Its playful nature pushes you to throw it about, pop off any obstacle in front of you and stove it into turns at a fair old lick. It'll take the abuse too, which just adds to the fun. While I liked my Scott Spark from last year, which also had 120mm (4.7in) of travel, the Habit feels that bit more formidable when pointed downhill, even if it's not quite as light or speedy when climbing back up.

I had some reservations about the suspension lockout but have found myself

using it quite regularly on my local trails, especially on the long road drags between sections of singletrack. The Habit comes with a dropper post too, which is one of the best ways to tap into any bike's trail flow potential. That said, with two shifters and two remotes bolted to the bar, things are too busy for my liking up front. Having plenty of gear choice is nice and all, but I'd rather keep things simple and ditch the front mech as soon as I can.

The guys at CSG (Cannondale's UK distributors) have already sent me a chainring to make the switch. I just need access to the specific tools required to pull apart the Cannondale HollowGram Si crankset. Once I've done that I can move the Reverb remote to the underside of the bar on the left-hand side and start sleeping properly once again.

I'm also going to have to swap the tyres. The Nobby Nic up front and Rocket Ron at the rear use Schwalbe's harder wearing, less grippy PaceStar compound, which just doesn't cut it on anything natural in the wet. I plan to slap on a set of Maxxis Shorty 3C TRs and convert the wheels to tubeless. With these couple of changes the Habit is going to be even more fun than it already is, and I can't wait!

SPEC DECK

FRAME Ballis Tec carbon fibre front triangle, SmartFormed alloy rear end, 120mm (4.7in) travel

FORK Cannondale Lefty 2.0 w/ XLoc Full Sprint remote, 120mm (4.7in) travel

SHOCK RockShox Monarch XX DebonAir w/ XLoc Full Sprint

DRIVETRAIN Shimano Deore XT M8000 w/ Cannondale HollowGram Si cranks (2x11)

WHEELSET Stan's NoTubes Arch EX rims on Cannondale Lefty 60 (f) and Formula (r) hubs, Schwalbe Nobby Nic PaceStar (f) and Rocket Ron PaceStar (r) 27.5x2.25in tyres

BRAKES Shimano Deore XT M8000

BAR/STEM Cannondale C1, 760mm/Cannondale C1, 60mm **SEATPOST/SADDLE** RockShox Reverb Stealth/Fabric Scoop

WEIGHT 12.88kg (28.4lb) with pedals and Maxxis Shorty tyres

MBUKLINES

We ride these long-term test bikes hard for a year, constantly scrutinising new kit, to bring you nothing but the truth about their performance



ALEX'S NUKEPROOF MEGA 275 PRO

£3,199.99 Hotlines www.hotlines-uk.com



Coming into the new year it's always a treat to be able to swing your leg over a new bike, and

Santa has been exceptionally generous this year. Nukeproof's new Mega 275 Pro is going to be my hardcore steed for 2016, hopefully ready to take a pasting under my clumsy captainship.

Originally conceived in 2009, the Mega takes its name from the infamous Megavalanche enduro downhill race – a not very subtle hint at its hardcore credentials. For 2016 it's all-new, touting a four-bar Horst Link

suspension system in place of the old faux-bar set-up, a lighter frame (my size large bike weighs 13.21kg without pedals) and a golden platter of components.

A RockShox Pike RTC3 is ready to take the hits up front, while out back there's a RockShox Monarch Plus RC3, both offering 160mm (6.3in) of travel. With a SRAM X1 1x11 drivetrain and 150mm RockShox Reverb dropper, this bike is ready to tackle the hardest climbs and longest descents. Nukeproof have specced a SRAM ROAM 40 wheelset and Guide RS brakes to keep

everything under control, and finished things off with a top-quality own-brand bar, stem, saddle, headset and grips. The bike looks like it should be the complete package.

I've had a brief ride and things are looking good. The Mega feels plush and responsive, and was pretty easy to get set up. The frame feels pretty stiff in the turns and is keen to jump. The only thing I noticed that'll need some attention is that the front end is pretty low, even with all the supplied spacers under the stem. A higher-rise bar is high on my list of upgrades.



JONNY'S TRANSITION TRANSAM 27.5

£1,499.99 Windwave www.windwave.co.uk



I spent the tail end of the summer riding various 'progressive' hardtails on my local trails in Bath and Bristol and was instantly impressed with how capable these modern bikes are. They

also showed me that I'd become a bit lazy with my riding style – 650b enduro bikes can hide a multitude of mistakes and bad habits! I thought it'd be a good idea to explore this rabbit hole further, and was greeted with this lairy 'hotrod orange' Transition TransAM at the end of it.

I opted for a large frame, going off the sizing chart on the American brand's website instead of following the upsizing fashion. When it was built up and sitting in front of me I was in two minds as to whether I'd made the right choice. It felt short and steep, and like my body weight was being thrown over the handlebar. I was comparing the ride position to all those super-long enduro bikes though, and actually the TransAM feels pretty good on the trail.

I've only been out a couple of times so far, on the tracks in Leigh Woods and Ashton Court, but I've been impressed. Climbing is efficient and confident, and easy compared to a 160mm full-bouncer. I approached the first steep descent with a fair amount of trepidation, but once I dropped in the ride was composed and controlled. I might not get any KOMs on it but I think this bike is far more suited to those rides where Strava is running and you just don't care.

The kit all seems pretty competent and I don't see the need to swap anything straight away. I'd like to switch up to a 1x11 transmission from the stock 10-speed set-up and maybe try a few different wheelsets to reduce weight, but otherwise I'm over the moon with my long-term bike this year.



£2,299 Whyte Bikes http://whyte.bike



My year on the amazing Intense Carbine showed me that a well-designed 29er

is hard to beat, especially for taller riders like myself. So what next? We gave Whyte's T-129 Works SCR an almost unheard of five stars last year, so the more affordable S model was at the top of my wishlist – especially when I heard Whyte were planning a rolling change that would update it with the same stiffer, single-ring specific frame used on the top-end model and the 1x11 drivetrain and beefy fork that seemed like glaring omissions from last year's bike. Here she is, and she looks tons of fun, with a super-long top tube (652.8mm on the XL frame), 67-degree head angle and sorted-looking spec. I can't wait to hit the trails!



MATT'S SPECIALIZED FATBOY COMP CARBON

£2,500 Specialized www.specialized.com



That's right – another year, another fatbike! I'm afraid you'll need to indulge

my nonconformity again in 2016 as I stick to the wider ride. Despite many believing the rise of the 'plus' bike to be the death knoll for 4in-and-over tyres I'm confident there's still a place for oversize shredders. My new carbon

Specialized Fatboy is almost a world apart from last year's steel Surly Ice Cream Truck Ops, weighing an impressive 13kg (28.8lb) out of the box and designed with going fast (for a fatbike) at its core, but with angles that are on the conservative side. All in all it looks like a pretty versatile fatbike with much less of a weight penalty than you would normally expect.



BEN'S SCOTT GENIUS 720

£3,199 Scott Sports www.scott-sports.com



I'm stoked to have joined the Wrecking Crew for 2016! Based out of

Bristol and working

full-time as a strength coach for mountain bikers (www.mtb strengthfactory.com), I've also been writing about bikes for the past year. I love technical, rooty, steep riding that lets me push my limits, and this summer I'll be racing enduro across the UK and hopefully Europe too.

The 720 sits in the middle of the Genius range and is the cheapest carbon-framed model. A Fox 34 fork and custom Fox Nude shock deliver 150mm of travel, and it runs on 650b Syncros wheels. It comes with Scott's TwinLoc system, which lets you switch between three suspension modes (locked out, 'traction control' and open) on the fly. Combined with the 2x10 drivetrain, this hints at this bike's go-anywhere ambitions.

The inclusion of adjustable geometry, courtesy of a 'flip chip' at the lower shock mount, helps make the bike more versatile, but even in the slacker setting the head angle is a little steep for my tastes, at 67.9 degrees. This is compounded by the cockpit, made up of a 70mm stem and 740mm bar, which delivers a nervous ride on rougher, steeper trails compared to the shorter

stems and wider bars I'm used to. The main limitation for winter riding, though, is the tyre choice. The low-profile Schwalbe Rocket Ron out back is a liability in the mud and the hard-compound Nobby Nic up front isn't much better. In standard trim it's certainly more of a trail bike than a hard-hitting enduro machine.

In the few weeks I've had the Scott I've already racked up over 150km of muddy riding. To make it more capable in the slop, I swapped the Nobby Nic to the back, ditching the Rocket Ron and added a burly Continental Der Baron Projekt up front, set up tubeless with Stan's sealant and rim strips. I also switched to

a 780mm Nukeproof Warhead Carbon bar and 35mm Burgtec stem, which sharpened the handling up a treat. Future plans include fitting a 1x drivetrain and reducing the head angle with a new headset.

SPEC DECK

FRAME HMF carbon fibre front triangle, alloy rear end, 150mm (5.9in) travel

FORK Fox 34 Float Performance w/ TwinLoc remote, 150mm (5.9in) travel

SHOCK Fox Nude w/ TwinLoc remote

DRIVETRAIN Shimano SLX w/ XT rear mech (2x10)

WHEELSET Syncros TR2.5 wheels, Schwalbe Nobby Nic EVO (f) and Rocket Ron EVO (r) 27.5x2.25in tyres

BRAKES Shimano SLX M675

BAR/STEM Syncros FL 1.5, 740mm/Syncros TR1.5,

SEATPOST/SADDLE X-Fusion Hilo Strate/Syncros XM2.0

WEIGHT 12.5kg (27.6lb), without pedals



here used to be a lot of full-suspension bikes available for less than £1,000 but those numbers have dropped dramatically in recent years. Yes, you can still get pig-heavy supermarket 'mountain bikes' with pogo stick suspension for £200 to £500 but they – and you

 won't last long on serious off-road trails.

A lot of major brands have stopped trying to turn out really cheap full-sussers. That's because making a crap bike can really compromise their reputation, even if it's no worse than most of the competition. If you get your design right though, you can really win big,

especially here in the UK. That's because the sub £1k price point isn't just a significant number in your head, it's also the cut-off point for the government/employer assisted Cycle to Work buying scheme.

So, which of our four are proper modern MTBs and which are singletrack swindles?





GIANT STANCE 27.5

£999 Does Giant's entry-level susser actually improve with simplicity?

0-010-010-0 SO GOOD

Pedals better than some more expensive bikes

Relatively light weight and fast tyres make for easy speed

Frame is worthy of future upgrading

The only bike here sold in independent bike shops

NO GOOD

Skinny QR fork can't handle trouble like the rest of the bike

Long stem causes stubborn steering on tech trails

0-010-010-0

JARGON BUSTER

Quick-release skewer Skinny 9mm diameter

steel spindle, tightened with a cam lever to pin the wheel in place

TaperedFork/frame that uses an oversize lower headset bearing to increase steering stiffness without adding much weight

esides GT – whose new Verb bike wasn't available for our test - Giant are the only big global manufacturer brave enough to go under the four-figure mark with a full-suspension bike. They've done a really good job of delivering on their reputation for sorted full-sussers too, and in some ways it's actually better for being simpler.

The frame

The Stance chassis follows the well-established format of more expensive Giants, complete with tapered head tube, press-fit bottom bracket (BB) and hydroformed tubes throughout. Unlike most bike manufacturers. Giant create the ALUXX alloy tubing and build the frames in their own factory, rather than subcontracting them to one of the handful of mega manufacturers such as, er, Giant. That means we've always had excellent long-term durability experience with their full-suspension bikes, both in terms of bearing life and general toughness. The asymmetric rear end will take a 2.35 to 2.4in tyre at a squeeze, and you get an easy-to-adjust post-mount rear brake. There are clips on the top tube for an

externally cabled dropper post, such as Giant's own Contact SL Switch, too. You don't get the convertible (for different axle types) dropouts of more expensive models though.

While the neat top rocker and the lower shock mount that doubles as the bike's main suspension pivot are straight from Giant's long-running 'Maestro' linkage system, the Stance isn't a Maestro design. Instead of a second, lower linkage and a solid rear subframe, it instead uses directly connected chainstays and seatstays that have been designed to flex very slightly as the suspension compresses. This 'FlexPoint' system saves weight and cost compared to extra pivots and linkages, and it turns out it's no bad thing in terms of ride quality either.

The kit

Giant are the only company here who generally work through independent bike dealers (they have a few wholly Giant 'concept' stores too). That means they have to add an extra level of cost so those shops can make enough money to stay open, which is useful when you suddenly need their expert advice or workshop help the day before a big ride. Then again, they

are one of the largest manufacturers in the world, so they can lean pretty hard on component suppliers to get the best price.

Although the Shimano Alivio gears only get a nine-speed cassette out back, the FSA crankset and own-brand cockpit/seating kit and wheelset aren't far off the quality of the components on the buy-direct bikes here. You also get a RockShox Monarch rear shock that's colour-matched to the frame like the fork and other parts. The only obvious downgrade is the RockShox 30 TK fork. While it's the 'Gold' version, with alloy rather than steel legs to reduce weight, those legs are only 30mm in diameter and the wheel connection is a quick-release skewer, not a (stiffer) through-axle like the other bikes here.

The ride

Unfortunately, the skinniness of the fork is obvious in the ride of the Stance. It's OK if you're just cruising smoothly or absorbing medium-size hits in a straight line without braking. But as soon as you try to turn or brake hard, the thin legs and spindly wheel connection mean vague and inconsistent tracking of the ground.



Braking and/or turning places enough stress on the fork that it also chokes obviously if it has to absorb a hit at the same time. The long 80mm stem doesn't help when you're trying to dodge something or force the bike across a rut or over an obstacle either. The good news is that, because the frame is already set up to take a tapered steerer, you've got an unrestricted choice of decent forks to pick from when you can afford to upgrade. If you want to add a through-axle to the package that's

going to mean a new front wheel (or at least hub) as well though.

The frame is potentially worth upgrading though, because the FlexPoint system actually produces a steadier, more efficient feel under pedalling than you'll find on Giant's more expensive Maestro bikes. The tubes are engineered to naturally keep the bike around the sag point, which means the shock can extend to follow dips and maintain traction, but the back end doesn't twang up and down as you pedal, like on some

flex-stay bikes. Add the fast-rolling Maxxis Ardent tyres and relatively low wheel and complete bike weight, and the Stance is a really smooth yet spirited way to cover miles. If you can work around the fork, it's not afraid to tackle red-graded descents at reasonable speed either.



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BOARDMAN FS TEAM

£999.99 Is Boardman's long-running budget champ finally showing its age?

SO GOOD

Lightweight and smoothly efficient frameset

RockShox Sektor fork heads up excellent value spec

NO GOOD

Needs careful rear shock set-up for efficient pedalling

Tall front end, steep angles and short wheelbase reduce confidence on lairier trails

0-010-010-0

JARGON BUSTER

Butted tubes

Frame tubes that are thinner in the middle and fatter at the ends where they're more stressed.

Low-speed compression damping

The valve(s) that control the slow-speed flow of oil inside a fork/shock to make it feel more stable when pedalling/braking.

oardman's FS Pro and FS Team double act have been the award-winning benchmark for bargain full-suspension bikes for several years. The Team is still better equipped than many hardtails at the same price, and the overall ride character is efficiently enjoyable and helpfully controlled on most trails too.

The frame

The frame is a well-proven design based around triple-butted tubes that are also bulged and shaped to cope with the extra structural load in high-stress areas. The hourglass-shaped tapered head tube earns the front of the frame some extra stiffness and precision that's backed up by the broad down tube and ovalised top tube. The pivot for the hanging suspension linkage pierces straight through the top tube, with a reinforcing plate smooth-welded underneath. A diagonal strut on the top side braces it against the extended seat tube.

While there's no internal dropper post routing, the top tube does get clips for an external cable/hose. The curved seat tube, asymmetric keyhole chainstay bridge and bridge-free

seatstays mean big tyre clearance too. While it doesn't get the 142x12mm through-axle rear end of the £1,399 FS Pro, the Team's chainstay pivots are double sided to create a reasonably stiff rear end. To keep costs down, the frame only comes in three sizes.

The kit

Limited sizing, only small-detail frame changes over the past few years and the fact they sell direct through Halfords mean Boardman have plenty of componentry cash to play with. As a result the RockShox Sektor fork plugs into the frame with a tapered steerer tube and connects securely to the front wheel with a 15mm through-axle. Heavy steel stanchions (the tubes that the lower legs of the fork slide up and down on) add a bit of weight but you get reasonable rebound adjustment and a rudimentary low-speed compression damping dial too. The rear shock only gets adjustable rebound, but the RockShox Monarch is generally a consistently controlled unit - though we had issues with our first sample.

Gearing is a SRAM mix, including a clutch-equipped X7 Type 2 rear mech to reduce chain slap. The twin-ring, through-axle FSA crankset is good

looking and noticeably stiffer than the separate-axle cranks on the Voodoo and Giant. The wheels are based around high-quality Mavic XM319 hubs, and the budget Continental tyres are much grippier than last year's because they're made in Conti's own new Asian factory. The Avid Elixir brakes are up-specced with quieter Centerline rotors, including a rare sighting of the 170mm disc up front. Finishing kit is all Boardman own-brand stuff, including a usefully short, reaction quickening stem, mid-width bar and firmly comfortable saddle.

The ride

The backswept seat tube and large amount of backwards offset on the seatpost create a rearward saddle position that meant most of our testers ended up sliding the seat a long way forward on its rails to get a balanced pedalling position. We also had to do a fair amount of pressure juggling with the shock. The sample we had turned out to have a blown compression damping circuit, but even with a fresh shock (and going by previous FS Team test experience) the Boardman needs to be run with more pressure than you'd expect to



reduce bouncing when pedalling, particularly out of the saddle. The relatively low wheel weight and fast-rolling X-King tyres mean it spins up to speed encouragingly if you stay seated and spinning though.

The Boardman's steering lacks the relaxed rowdy-trail confidence of the Voodoo and Calibre but the stiff frame and through-axle fork mean its fast reactions are impressively accurate. It can cope with more trouble than the

Giant too, whether you're forcing the fork through rocks and roots or dodging between the really dangerous stuff. The rear shock can unsettle stability and create an over-tall front end feel as it dives deep into its travel if you start driving the bike hard into corners or hauling on the anchors. That can be balanced reasonably well by reducing fork pressure and pushing the saddle forward, but that then cuts into the effective reach of the frame.

The relatively short wheelbase also undermines its confidence in high-speed sweeping turns on slippery surfaces. If you're after a naturally faster feeling and handling bike though, it's still excellent, smooth riding value for money.

MBUK

Needs more set-up tweaks than the best in this class, but still a great value trail/XC bike

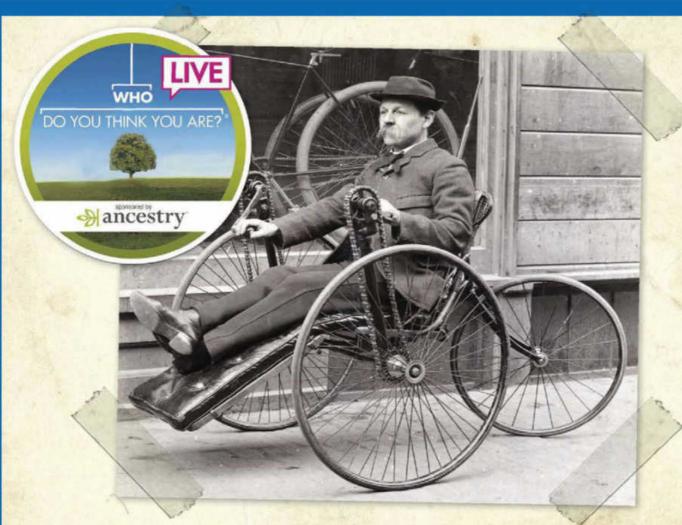




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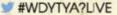
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IF WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE? LIVE



VOODOO CANZO

£799.99 Tweak it right and the Canzo is a totally Can-do ride

0-010-010-0 SO GOOD

Far more capable and fun than we expected for £800

Properly modern trail geometry

Well-shaped cockpit Potentially good fork with a bit of DIY

NO GOOD

Suspension needs careful fettling (and potentially, surgery) to work smoothly

Wet-hating tyres are obvious upgrade candidates, followed by the flexy cranks

0-010-010-0

JARGON BUSTER

Square-taper axle A steel spindle with

square, tapered ends that squeeze into matching holes in the crank arms. Tend to be flexy/creak prone

Steerer tube

The pipe at the top of the fork that plugs into the frame and which the stem and bar then bolt onto

t may have 'Black Magic' tubing but the spooky thing about VooDoo's Canzo is just how well it works on even the toughest trails. You might have to get your knife out for a bit of witch-doctoring first though.

The frame

The 'orange peel' paint, the two separate linkage plates driving the shock and the single-sided chainstay pivots all point to the cheaper price of the Canzo. Grab the rear wheel and wrench it about though and the extensively hydroformed frame is as stiff as that of the other bikes here. Cables are kept neat and tidy under the down tube, and there's plenty of tyre room at the back. There are no dropper post cable guides though, the head tube is straight rather than tapered and there are only three frame sizes. The good news is that if one of those fits, the angles and dimensions are really on-point, with a 67-degree head angle and very long 630mm top tube and 1,190mm wheelbase on our large test bike.

The kit

VooDoo make the most of that with a short 60mm stem for quick reactions and a usefully wide handlebar with lock-on grips to make those steering decisions stick. While the SR Suntour Epixon fork has a straight rather than tapered steerer, a neat 15mm 'Q-LOC' through-axle locks the wheel in place and its 140mm (5.5in) of travel is matched by an Epixon shock out back.

The old-school square-taper BB axle is a reminder that the VooDoo is the cheapest bike here by £200, and the Tektro Auriga brakes feel wooden too. On the plus side, there's a Shimano SLX front mech highlight in an otherwise Alivio/Altus gear set-up, the Formula-hubbed wheels seem robust at a competitive weight and while the Kenda tyres are slippery when wet, they're tough enough to take a beating on rocky trails.

The ride

That's a good job too, because the Canzo makes it clear it's the right shape to hit the trails hard from the very first drop. In fact, unless you've spent time diligently heating the pads by doing sprints and stops in the car park, the limited power of the Tektro brakes means you're probably going to hit the first drop faster than you'd bargained for. The remarkable thing is

that, despite this being an £800 bike, this doesn't spell disaster.

While the Suntour fork and shock are notchy and harsh at first, the through-axle fork keeps the wheel on track even if you slam down hard into a hectic landing zone. The long front end, reasonably slack steering and extended wheelbase keep the VooDoo naturally stable whatever's happening under the wheels, and there's enough leverage and quick-reaction speed in the cockpit to grab the bike if things do get out of shape. Even on the first run, the 140mm of rear travel takes the power out of some of the punches the trail throws too.

The VooDoo magic only improves if you do a little bit of surgery and sorcery yourself too. Having seen how much more smooth control we got from Suntour's flagship Auron fork with a simple internal modification, we checked with them and downloaded their exploded diagram PDFs to see if the same hack could be done with the Epixon. As soon as we got the green light it was mere minutes' work to depressurise the fork, unscrew the left-hand air cap, pull out the volumeadjusting 35mm yellow elastomer, chop 20mm off it and reinstall it.



The previous choking and lack of travel under repeated hits vanished, replaced by a much smoother and more consistent stroke that was easily a match for the Sektor forks of the Calibre and Boardman and much more controlled than the 30 TK of the Giant. Finding the sweet spot of rebound adjustment on the rear shock between hiccuping kickback and stuttering pack-down was a longer trial-and-error process. We safe-cracked our way there one click at a time though, and

with both ends sorted had a genuinely black run ready bike on our hands.

The VooDoo didn't disgrace itself on the way back up either. The cranks' square-taper axle and thin, S-curved arms mean a soft feel if you're really stomping on the pedals but the Canzo still has a definite 'can do' attitude to climbs. Once you've got the rebound on the shock adjusted right it keeps the chunky Kenda treads well connected even on washed out, rock covered trails or step-ups. The

naturally sorted and balanced ride position makes it fine for multi-hour rides too, and so far nothing has fallen off, come loose or otherwise suggested it's going to die soon despite the fact we've given the VooDoo a proper beating through the worst weather imaginable.

MBUK

A bit of fork and shock fettling unleashes full on, flat out confidence at an absolute bargain price







CALIBRE BOSSNUT

£999.99* Calibre's Bossnut is a flat out, full bore ultra bargain

SO GOOD

Sorted all-rounder geometry. Confident flat out but not floppy on climbs

Outstanding spec for the money

Tough and capable enough for black run bombing, efficient for all-day epics

NO GOOD

Patience is required to dial in the rebound damping and get the rear suspension working at its best

0-010-010-0

JARGON BUSTER

Dropper seatpost

Telescopic post that lets you drop your saddle height on the fly with an under-seat or bar-mounted lever.

Hydroforming

Process of pressure moulding tubing into multiple shapes to handle the various stresses and strains on the frame

efore we even start talking about the bike there are two points we need to cover. The first is that the Bossnut has a listed retail price of £1,299.99 - way above the other bikes here. Pay £5 for a GO Outdoors loyalty card though and it's bang on the money at £999.99. Secondly, yes, local bike shops are a vital part of keeping us on the trails and for most of us were the first leg up into a life of bikes. But there's no avoiding the fact that big sports supermarkets and online shops are now a major force in the bike business. Totally sorted, incredible value machines like the Calibre make it clear why too.

The frame

The Bossnut chassis isn't outstanding in any way, but it does everything it needs to very well. The tapered head tube and hydroformed main tubes create a stiff-tracking front end with plenty of standover space. The straight seat tube with QR clamp means easy saddle drop potential until you upgrade to a dropper post too. Low-slung seatstays are braced by a small kicker link on the seat tube before meeting up with the RockShox Monarch damper to give 130mm (5.1in) of rear travel. The

rectangular and square-section back end is equally tidy, with the QR rear axle the only hint that this is a budget bike.

The geometry is bang-on for technical trail riding too, with a slacker than listed 66.7-degree head angle but relatively steep 73.5-degree seat angle and standard issue 340mm BB height proving Calibre haven't just stuck a long fork in an old, out of date frame. Sizing options are limited to small, medium and large though, and the reach is adequate rather than stretched so you may want to size up.

The kit

Where Calibre really start to score with the Bossnut is componentry. Even if you go through the spec with a fine-tooth comb it's a genuinely weak-link free selection that we'd be content with on a bike at twice the price. The 760mm Ritchey bar gives loads of trail-taming leverage and the matching stem gives a good balance of responsive but not twitchy steering manners for a range of riders and riding. The Sektor fork they sit on top of is the same slightly heavy, steellegged Silver model found on the Boardman, but again a 15mm axle gives accurate wheel placement and

line-holding in hairy situations. The WTB i23 rims and tyres are tubeless ready if you add tape and valves, and the combination of Vigilante front and Bee Line rear tyres gives a great balance of traction and speed.

A full set of Shimano Deore stop and go gear brings a ton of small but significant features as well as slick 20-speed shifting and proven durability. The shifters use integrated I-Spec mounts for a clean cockpit and the brakes offer significantly better feel and control than those on the VooDoo and Giant. The switchable clutch mechanism on the Shadow Plus rear mech increases spring strength to stop chain slap and makes a future switch to a single chainring up front simple.

The ride

The amazing thing about the Bossnut is that nothing needs upgrading to complete a totally sorted package. While it's not as stretched out and stable at the front end as the Voodoo, as soon as you settle in behind the wide bar it feels well balanced and confident. Because it's a bit shorter in the wheelbase you don't have to 'bus driver' the wide way round tight turns and even novice riders synced with the





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Calibre straight away. It's mechanically totally sorted too. Deore is a byword for smooth efficiency and the brakes are richly communicative, with extra power from the 180mm front rotor. The through-axle cranks and fast-rolling rear tyre combine with the lightweight wheelset for prompt and enthusiastic acceleration as soon as you press on the pedals.

The rear shock uses a relatively firm compression damping setting so there

are no worries about suspension bounce unless you're really heaving a heavy gear round out of the saddle. It did take us a bit of time to totally dial the rebound in so the damper felt controlled rather than dead but we'd rather have a stable back end than a pogo stick. The Sektor fork runs fine with the recommended pressures printed on the leg, so there's no need to take a knife to the internals to get a consistently controlled ride on rougher

trails. In fact, it's when you start pushing the Bossnut hard on tougher trails that it becomes clear just what a great all-round, blast-anything bike this is and what an incredible job Calibre have done for the money.

Calibre's impressively efficient, controlled and flat-out fun all-rounder totally resets the meaning of value



THE SPEC DECK









BELOW AVERAGE:

* * * * *

POOR: Simply put, don't bother!

What to look for How to find your perfect brakes

YDRAULIC DISC BRAKES are seemingly simple things. You clamp one end to your handlebar so that when you pull a lever it pumps non-squashable hydraulic fluid down a pipe to the calliper bolted to your fork or frame at the other end. The fluid presses on the back of the brake pistons, pushing the pads onto a circular rotor mounted to your wheel. The harder you pull the lever, the harder the pads grab the disc, turning more of the energy created by your forward motion into heat and therefore slowing you down.

Pretty much every part of that process is done slightly differently by different brakes though, so how do you know which are best for you? Starting at the beginning, you want a lever that gets on with its neighbours. Shimano and SRAM brakes are available with combo clamps that can carry their shifters too, and Formula and Hope stoppers can also be synced to shifters with adaptors. Shimano brakes really don't work well with SRAM shifters though.

Levers can vary in shape and width, plus posh ones are carbon to save a few grams, but what really matters is how they feel when you pull them. That can be altered by pretty much everything downstream of the lever. The leverage created by pivot position (and any variable cam action) as well as the piston bores at the lever or calliper ends directly affects feel and power. The smoothness of the seals at either end, solidity of the lever mount, lever pivot quality and stiffness of the

calliper construction all affect feel and power too. Different brakes will also work in different ways based on pad spacing, lever stroke and pad compound. That means adjustable levers make sense if you're really finicky about feel, but check our reviews to see which dials actually work. Some brakes handle heat better than others too, which is crucial in heavy use situations such as foreign mountain holidays.

Rotor design and pad compound affect performance too. We've tested all the brakes here in a 180mm front, 160mm rear pairing but altering disc size by 20mm will increase/decrease power by around 20 per cent. Resin pads are quieter and feel more powerful initially but wear much faster, particularly in wet conditions. High-temperature gas release can also cause progressive and potentially scary power fade on longer descents. Sintered pads can be noisier and are generally lower friction (less powerful) but last longer and are more consistent under heavy use.

Any air in a badly bled system or contamination of fluid, pads or rotors can have a catastrophic effect on performance. Fresh pads can be a significant upgrade at a relatively low cost though, so if you're after max value you should always check you're getting the best from your existing brakes before upgrading. If you definitely need new brakes – because you're building a fresh bike or your current ones are dead – though, then we've got everything here from super-cheap to super-powerful and every subtle sub-level in between.

HOW WE TESTED THEM

WE TEST OUR long-term sample brakes all year round in conditions that vary from flat-out runs down the French Alps to sub-zero epics in the Arctic Circle. We also run through different samples of the major brake types over and over again while we're testing complete bikes. When it comes to our annual group tests though, we pull all our test sets back in to test them head-to-head on the same trails in the same conditions. As part of the final shootout we'll also fully inspect, bleed and service our brakes to see how they've held up to a hard life on the trails. If we find there are any issues with our existing brakes we'll order fresh ones to make sure we test each set at its best.

As well as our on-trail comparisons we've also got dynometer test data for nearly all the brakes here, which allows us to back up our personal experience with carefully calibrated, ultra-accurate power and operating temperature figures. The blend of all this information and experience is what makes our brake tests the most detailed and dependable you'll find anywhere.

NB: All brakes weighed and tested with 180mm front rotor and relevant hardware.



Guy Kesteven Our Kes has been using disc brakes on his bikes since

Guy Kesteven
Our Kes has been
using disc brakes
on his bikes since
the original Pro
Stop and Hope
mechanical designs
over two decades
ago and he's still
testing more sets
than anyone else
in the world.

JARGON BUSTER

- > **Banjo** Hose-to-calliper connector that can be rotated to give cleaner brake line routing.
- > **Bite point** The point in the lever stroke where the brake pads contact the rotor.
- > **Centerlock** Shimano's rotor mounting system, which uses a
- splined hub and disc mount and a screw-on lockring.
- > **Finned pads** Pads with added fins that sit above the calliper to radiate braking heat away
- > Four-pot Brake that uses four cylinders in each calliper, normally in two pairs of different diameters.
- > **Organic/resin** Pads with a bonded soft, high grip, reduced heat compound.
- > **Sandwich rotor** Disc design that sandwiches an alloy core for rapid heat dispersal between two steel braking surfaces.
- > Sintered Pad containing tiny
- metal (normally copper) pieces to increase wear life.
- > **Six-bolt** The standard rotor mounting format, which uses six evenly spaced Torx T25 bolts.
- > **Tool-free adjuster** Dial that lets you adjust lever feel using only your fingers.
- > **Two-piece rotor** Disc made up of an aluminium central spider fixed to a steel braking surface.



Shimano XTR M9020 Trail

£241.97 Madison www.madison.co.uk Weight: 408g

SHIMANO'S FLAGSHIP TRAIL brake looks beautiful and potentially has stunning control and modulation but we've struggled to get consistent performance on several sets we've used.

For £10 more than the magnesium bodied M9000 XC version, the Trail gets several extra features. These include leverage-changing Servo-Wave roller cam action between blade and piston to give plenty of pad clearance when 'off' but more power at the point of contact. There's also a 'free stroke' adjuster that theoretically changes bite point and a reach adjuster on the knuckle of the super-short and broad carbon blade. At the brake end you get Shimano's unique Ice Tech pads (resin fitted, with a sintered set in the box). They advise using the

brakes with their 'frilled' Freeza rotors to keep as much heat as possible away from the mineral oil powered system.

On a good set this all combines to create a lightweight and adequately powerful set-up. Once you're used to the Servo-Wave cam action, modulation through the stubby levers is fantastically rich too. Unfortunately we've been having repeated issues with dramatically changing bite point (up to 6mm) between first and second lever pulls, even on sets bled by Shimano's own mechanics. We've spotted updates on newer test samples that should remedy this nerve-racking issue and deliver the performance you'd expect at this price.

MBUK * * * * *







TRP Slate T4

£141.97 Upgrade Bikes www.upgradebikes.co.uk Weight: 471g

THESE FOUR-PISTON all-rounders from budget brake mega brand Tektro's top-end line are keenly priced, but don't feel as keen through the levers.

The hinged Shimano I-Spec compatible bar clamp and the adjustable-angle hose banjo on the calliper make them easy to fit. The short dimpled levers have a wide Allen key adjusted reach range, and modulation is OK once they engage.

The brakes alone cost £89.99 if you've already got your own adaptors and rotors, and we'd avoid the alloy and stainless steel TRP rotors our brakes were supplied with anyway because they're heavier than most cheaper one-piece discs. We'd suggest going

for a 200mm front, 180mm rear set-up to get enough muscle for more aggressive riding though, because you really need to squeeze them to lock either end

The Slate also burns through its original pads very quickly in typical UK conditions. In a way that's a blessing in disguise though, because aftermarket Shimano Saint/Zee pattern pads from RWD or Shimano offer noticeably improved braking bite and longevity.

Our test set suffered from variable first pull bite point issues even after several bleeding sessions too, though they came right in the end.

MBUK * * * *









FSA Afterburner

£170.89 Windwave www.windwave.co.uk Weight: 443g

FSA INTRODUCED THEIR disc brake range last year and the Afterburner is the more affordable brother of the K-Force, which offers a carbon lever and titanium bolts for £80 more. Both use the same angular mid-size lever body with twin-bolt clamp and ambidextrous design. Reach and bite point are adjustable without tools, though the latter only gives a subtle change.

The cam-assisted 'Quick Draw' action means the pads contact the rotor early in the stroke anyway, and the forged single-piece calliper adds a precise contact feel. The hose attaches with an angle-adjustable rose for clean set-up and the user-friendly top-loading pads are Avid Elixir/SRAM XX/X0 pattern so

finding spares is easy. FSA even use different compression ratings on the hoses in a bid to even out front and back brake feel.

The brake itself is fairly priced for its features at £149.95 and rotors are a bargain at £12.95. We'd recommend going at least a size bigger with the disc than you normally would though, because despite a sharp initial bite the Afterburner is noticeably lacking in power if you carry on squeezing. Our long-term samples haven't weathered that well either, needing regular bleeding of the mineral oil system in order to stay consistent.









SRAM Guide R

£142.49 Fisher Outdoor Leisure www.fisheroutdoor.co.uk Weight: 473g

THE CHEAPEST BRAKE in SRAM's Guide family gets a simplified design that's not quite as rich in feel but it's still a consistent, user friendly performer with great syncing options.

Multiple bar clamp choices mean the ambidextrous levers can be mounted separately, with shifters or RockShox suspension/dropper post remotes. The lever pivots close to the bar to give a unique sweep that seems to amplify the brake's adequate actual stopping power on the trail. There's an external reach adjuster too. The R lacks the 'Swing Link' piston actuator cam of the £15 more expensive RS brake though, which means no power boost at the contact

point and a less richly modulated feel. It's worth spending the extra if you can.

The lever sweep and smoothly progressive pressure application of the four-pot calliper still make it one of the better feeling brakes available though. Reliability is also good, and bleeding is simple using SRAM's syringe kit. Pad life is relatively short but replacement is easy and there are lots of longer lasting aftermarket options. The slotted Centerline rotor is expensive at £35 but a lot quieter than previous SRAM/Avid discs, and the brake itself is a decent price at £100.





Magura MT5 Next

£124.99 Zyro www.zyro.co.uk Weight: 463g

THE MT5'S PLASTICKY feel and blunt power won't suit everyone, but this distinctive German anchor is massively powerful and well priced.

Magura mainly produce injection moulded plastic car parts so their use of a moulded 'Carbotecture' lever body isn't surprising. It gives a spongy feel to the two-finger alloy blade though, and power comes on very strong and early in the stroke. The blunt, limited modulation feel is compounded by the fact that Magura's four-pots are the most powerful brakes we've ever used by a fair margin.

If you're after maximum power for your pound they're worth taming though, because after a bad start – we

broke the cover off the reservoir and suffered complete brake failure on our first ride – we've had no issues since. We're still on our original set of four small pads despite a busy year of testing on our GT Force long-termer, and the 'wood screw' style bar-clamp bolts haven't caused any problems either.

The super-long hoses need to be cut to fit your bike, but we didn't have to re-bleed them and the mineral oil driven system hasn't needed rinsing through since either. While value is impressive, the MT5 is only available as a complete bundle with rotors and hardware.





Formula RO Racing

£289.94 Silverfish www.silverfish-uk.com Weight: 364g

FORMULA'S OVAL-PISTON RO brake has been an outstanding lightweight performer for those with plenty of cash for a while, and the Racing version takes performance and price to new extremes.

Despite the big calliper and the large-volume reservoir for the pull (not push) piston design, weight is lower than on a lot of XC race brakes. The deeply-crooked lever and pair of large oval pistons exert serious bite on the rotor though, producing significantly more power than all but the 100g heavier Magura and Zee brakes. Modulation of that power is precise and controllable too.

Although reach is adjustable the lever bites very early in its stroke, which won't

suit riders who only like to start stopping with the blade almost touching their grips. Limited pad retraction means careful set-up is crucial to stop irritating scuffing noises and even then the RO Racing still gets noisy sooner than other brakes in dirty conditions.

Bleeding requires patience too, but the titanium bolts that save the final few grams are a lot tougher than the tiny alloy bolts of previous Formula brakes. Exotic materials mean an exotic price but if you like the lever feel and you're after genuine DH power at an XC weight there's no other brake that comes close.







Hope Tech 3 E4

£209.50 Hope Technology www.hopetech.com Weight: 469g

IN A WORLD of mass produced brakes, Hope's meticulously machined anchors are a standout feature on any bike. Their performance – particularly in the longer term – is equally outstanding too.

The E4 calliper comes attached to one of two levers – the Tech 3 or minimalist Race. For 40g more (some of that is due to titanium bolts) the Tech 3 adds separate reach and bite point dials on the curved and drilled-for-grip lever. Unlike the bite point adjustment on practically every other brake, Hope's actually works, allowing you to even up the contact point of the pads on your front and rear brakes.

While the Hope brake isn't as rich and squeezable in modulation as the

'warmest' feeling stoppers here, the precision lever pivots and one-piece machined calliper with four equaldiameter pistons give a really clean feel. Power is comparable with the Shimano and SRAM competition (the Tech 3 V4 offers 20 per cent more for an extra 60g) but it's the durability and reliability of Hope's brakes that really stands out. Samples that we've been hammering for several years still feel brand new and their factory direct back-up is brilliant if you do ever have a problem. Pad life is good, and braided hose and anodised colour options are the electro icing on an excellent long-term investment.





SRAM Guide Ultimate

£309 Fisher Outdoor Leisure www.fisheroutdoor.co.uk Weight: 401g

WHILE SOME BRANDS just add a carbon lever and some Ti bolts to create their flagship brakes, the Guide Ultimate also gets subtle but significant internal changes to create a performance and control difference when riding at full gas.

The lever body is essentially the same as the Guide RSC's. That includes the silky smooth cartridge-bearing pivot, power-amplifying 'SwingLink' cam and stiff but effective tool-free bite point and lever reach adjustment. The new carbon blade, Ti hardware and alloy-centre rotor contribute to an impressively light weight. The lever syncs well with SRAM/RockShox remotes and shifters too.

The S4 calliper is all-new, with four hybrid, super-tight tolerance alloy/

phenolic resin pistons, more supple seals and improved airflow and heat shielding. That reduces operating temperature, no matter how long or steep the hill (we've checked that in the Alps too). It also creates more consistent braking performance at the extremes of use, with flawlessly subtle and immediately responsive modulation however hot, cold, wet or rough things get.

The Guide Ultimate's high price will be an issue for many, original pad wear is rapid and big or aggressive riders may want to size up the rotors. We'd still say it's the best controlled all-round brake available though.





Clarks M2

£19.98 Clarks Cycle Systems www.clarkscycles.com Weight: 475g

IT'S HARD TO believe, but Clarks really do offer a fully hydraulic, adequately controlled brake for less than £20 an end.

The first thing to point out is that the M2 only comes as a complete front and rear set (for £39.99), which isn't ideal if you only need one brake. The bundle also includes rotors and relevant brackets, so you've got everything you need if you're starting from scratch but potentially more than you require if you've already got discs and mounts. The closed bar clamp also means you have to slide off your grips in order to fit the brakes.

The hose exit angle on the calliper is fixed, but the brake line does connect on the wheel side of the calliper to keep it safer from transport and crash damage.

The lever syncs well with most shifters too, and the neat one-piece forged calliper gets a red anodised bore cap for a deceptively deluxe look. The M2 takes standard Shimano pads (even finned ones) that load easily from the top, bleeding is simple and the mineral oil in its veins is paint and eco friendly.

The only significant downside is a noticeable lack of stopping power, but that improves if you fit aftermarket pads and can always be boosted by going up a rotor size. Control and feel are significantly better than on most bargain brakes, and reliability of long-term sets we've run through recent years has been impressively consistent.











Shimano Zee

£136.97 Madison www.madison.co.uk Weight: 461g

ZEE IS BASICALLY a cheaper version of Shimano's pro-level Saint downhill groupset, and these bombproof and vastly powerful yet subtly controlled brakes are a brilliant bargain.

The short, broad lever gets dimples for grip and reach adjustment via a recessed Allen bolt, reducing accidental damage potential. The easy-fit hinged bar clamp has a locking pin to stop it falling off if the single bolt comes loose and you can attach a Shimano I-Spec shifter to it. The Servo-Wave cam action means loads of pad-to-rotor clearance to keep the long calliper and pads scuff free

even in dirty conditions. Despite bulky looks, system weight is unobtrusively average.

Power application through the twin paired brake cylinders is impressively progressive, growing from a surprising subtle initial bite to properly eye-popping stopping as the blade gets nearer to the bar. The Zee brake doesn't have the largely ineffective 'Free Stroke' adjustment screw of Saint, XTR and XT, and feel and modulation are extremely consistent and reliable as a result.

Apart from split pin (rather than threaded bolt and circlip) pad retention, the calliper is

identical to Saint too. That gives Zee damage-dodging wheel-side hose attachment and the ability to upgrade to finned heat-shedding Ice Tech pads for big mountain work. Because the brake is sold separately for £104.95, you can team it with steel/alloy sandwich and radiator-frilled Freeza rotors too if you want. Whatever brake set you create, this super-powerful but user friendly stopper deserves to be far more popular than its rarity on the trail suggests.

MBUK * * * * *



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All our route maps are put together by route guru Max Darkins. Max loves travelling the country in search of the best trails and is also the man behind www.roughride guide.co.uk.

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HOW TO

CREATE THE ULTIMATE HOME WORKSHOP

WHETHER YOU'RE CONFINED TO THE KITCHEN, HAVE A SHED OR EVEN A GARAGE, HERE'S HOW TO SET UP YOUR OWN MAINTENANCE MAN CAVE

Words Alex Evans Pics Dave Caudery

orking on your bike is a rite of passage for any mountain biker. It often begins in the kitchen or living room, where you'll incur the wrath of your other half, parents or landlord if you dirty the carpet, scuff the walls or stain the sofa. When the inevitable happens, it's time to move outdoors. Oil can be squired around a shed without regard for wallpaper or ornaments, bigger tasks can be taken on that require bigger tools, and before you know it, you'll be craving a proper man cave. Once you attain the holy grail of workshop space, a garage, your car will be demoted to the street so you can achieve shock tuning and frame fixing nirvana. Whichever stage you're at, read on to find out what you'll need to help you on your way...

HOME MECHANIC

If you're still in the fledgling stages of bike spannering or don't have any outside space, then the kitchen is a good place to start, with a wipe-clean floor and work surfaces at just the right height. Failing that, the living or dining room will have to do. Just don't go wild and cover the settee in oil and grease! To make life easier, we recommend getting your rookie mitts on these items – they'll minimise mess (potentially saving you from a barrage of abuse) and help keep your bike rolling smoothly.



good grease and condition-specific

lubricant. There are loads of options

Finish Line, Pedro's, Juice Lubes and

Green Oil. Just don't get any on your

to choose from, from the likes of

brake pads or discs!

















O1 Chain slap

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The chain slapping against the frame makes a right racket. Use some brake cleaner or degreaser to clean the rear triangle/ swingarm and you should be able to see where the chain is hitting the frame. Use a chainstay protector, the soft (looped) side of sticky-backed Velcro, thick rubber mastic tape or an old inner tube to cover any areas of contact. The top and bottom of the driveside chainstay and the inner face of the seatstay are all worth covering if you can.

02 Squeaky seat

If you can hear creaking when you're putting weight on the saddle, remove the seatpost from the frame and the saddle from the post. Give the saddle clamp and rails a good clean and a light coating of grease. Then reassemble, checking the torque settings of all the bolts. Lightly coat the inside of the seat tube with grease or (if the post or frame is made from carbon fibre) carbon assembly compound, then refit the post in the frame.

03 Creaky cranks

Noises from the crank area can be a nightmare to pin down. First, check the chainring bolts are tight if not, apply some grease and tighten to the correct torque. Next, following the manufacturer's instructions, treat your pedals to some fresh grease. If you ride flats, check the pins are tight too. If the creak is still there, it's likely an issue with the bottom bracket or crank/BB interface. Remove the cranks, disassemble the BB, regrease it, reassemble and check torque settings.

04 Dry chain

If your drivetrain is squeaking as you pedal, spray it with chain degreaser and leave it to soak in a while. Then clean the chain – either place it in a chain scrubber or wrap it in an old rag, and then spin the cranks backwards. Once clean, backspin the cranks while evenly and lightly coating the chain inside and out with lube. Lubricate the jockey wheels too. Wipe off the excess with a rag.

05 Rattly shock

Worn shock bushes can cause creaking or rattling when you ride over rough ground. Hold the bike at the top of the seat tube and lift it gently up and down while feeling for movement between the shock and the frame with your other hand. Feel for play at both ends of the shock. If there's movement or a knocking sound you've got worn bushes. You'll need to get your local bike shop to replace them, unless you know how to do the job (and have the tools) yourself.



Tools for the job Essential kit

- 1 Electrical tape 2 Degreaser 3 Torque wrench
- 4 Large flat-bladed screwdriver or pad separator
- **5** Zipties
- 6 Allen key set
- 7 Chain lube
- 8 Carbon assembly compound
- **9** Grease **10** Workshop rags

Not pictured

11 Chainstay protector (alternatives include sticky-backed Velcro or rubber mastic tape)

- 12 Chain scrubber (optional)
- 13 BB tools (vary by crankset)



06 Squealing brakes



Noisy brakes can often be down to a misaligned calliper. Remove the wheel and use a pad separator or flat-bladed screwdriver to push the pistons back into the calliper. Loosen the calliper mount bolts just enough so it can move freely from side to side.



Replace the wheel in the frame, then squeeze the brake lever several times. It should 'pump up' when the pads first make contact with the rotor, then achieve a consistent feel.



With the lever pulled towards the bar, do up the calliper bolts, swapping between them every half turn. Spin the wheel. The calliper should be central over the rotor, with no contact between the pads and disc when you're not braking.

07 Wobbly headset



To check if the headset is loose, stand astride the bike and squeeze the front brake firmly with one hand. With the other, hold the top of the headset and rock the bike forwards and backwards while feeling for play or knocking.



If there is play, loosen the stem bolts (anticlockwise). Next, turn the top-cap bolt clockwise to tension the headset, stopping before the headset becomes stiff. Now ensure your handlebar is straight - see Ask MBUK on p132 for how best to do this.



Retighten the stem clamp bolts to the correct torque. Then repeat step 1. If there's still play, repeat step 2, applying more torque to the top-cap bolt. If there's still play or the headset is stiff, you probably need new bearings.

08 Cable clatter



Where cables are tapping against each other, use a ziptie to hold them together. Don't do it up super-tight the cables need to move when you turn the bar. If that doesn't allow enough cable movement, use two interlocking zipties as shown above.



If you have two cables that run parallel to one another, the neatest solution is to use electrical tape to lash them together. Wrap the tape around the pair of cables tightly, but make sure this doesn't affect the range of movement of the handlebar.



If the cable outers are moving around in the frame's cable guides or internal routing, you can stop the noise with a couple of small zipties. A ziptie around the outer at each end of the cable routing will stop it moving, keeping everything quieter.



I'm new to mountain biking and when I read your reviews I constantly see references to head and seat angles. Why should I care about these figures and what do they mean? What are good head and seat angles for general trail riding? Any information would be greatly appreciated!

Steven Peters, Exeter

The head angle is the angle at which a line drawn through the centre of a bike's head tube hits the ground. A slacker head angle will rake out the fork and slow down the steering, which is a plus for descending. A steeper head angle will create a quicker-steering bike that's better suited to flatter trails. Typically, head angles range from 68 to 70 degrees on cross-country bikes and



62 to 64 degrees on downhill bikes, while trail bikes sit in between at 64 to 67 degrees.

The seat angle is the angle at which a line drawn through the centre of the seat tube hits the ground. For trail riding, a fairly steep seat angle of between 73 and 75 degrees makes life easier when climbing by shifting your weight further forwards on the bike. It also improves pedalling efficiency, because it sits you almost directly over the bottom bracket.



Are carbon wheels really worth the money? I want some new wheels but just don't know whether I can part with that much cash.

Alex Travers, via email

It really depends on what you're after from your wheels and what size you need. We've found that a good set of carbon fibre hoops can transform a 29er thanks to how stiff they are. If you have 26in or 650b wheels though, that difference - with some carbon wheels at least - can feel less pronounced. If you decide not to go with carbon, the aluminium alternatives available from the likes of Mavic, Hope and Superstar still offer impressive stiffness at reasonable weights and significantly lower prices.

I'm in the market for some new tyres. My mates have given Schwalbe's glowing reviews, but I don't fully understand the difference between their PaceStar, TrailStar and VertStar versions...

Andy Langley, via email

These names refer to the rubber compounds Schwalbe use in their tyres. PaceStar tyres are faster rolling and last longer but have less grip. The TrailStar compound balances grip and rolling speed much better, and while the tyres don't last as long, the improved grip makes a big difference. VertStar tyres are reserved for downhill riding because they drag on climbs but grip like crazy. They wear more quickly than the others too.



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QUICK FIX MOUNTAIN BIKE TIPS

Straighten your handlebar



Straddle your bike, then loosen off the steerer clamp bolts at the back of the stem slightly, turning them anticlockwise with the correct size Allen key, so that the stem can rotate on the fork steerer.



Start by lining the stem up with the centre treads on your front tyre. Then look down over your handlebar and check that the edge of the bar nearest you is equidistant from the dials at the top of both fork legs.



While holding the bar, nudge the wheel with your foot until the bar and stem are properly aligned. Then retighten the stem's steerer clamp bolts to the manufacturer's specified torque setting, turning them clockwise.

CONTACT US:

Write to: Ask MBUK, 2nd Floor, Tower House, Fairfax Street, Bristol Email: askmbuk@bikeradar.com Visit: www.mbuk.com



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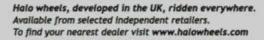
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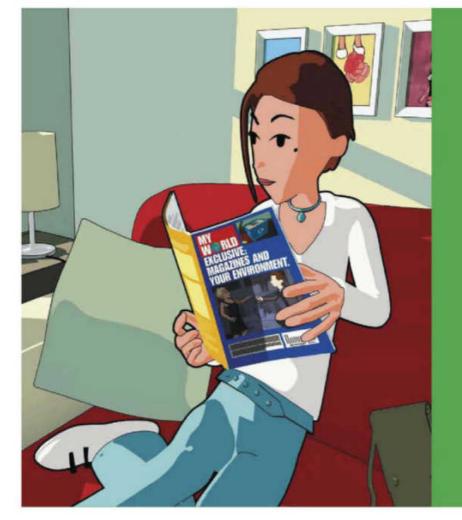








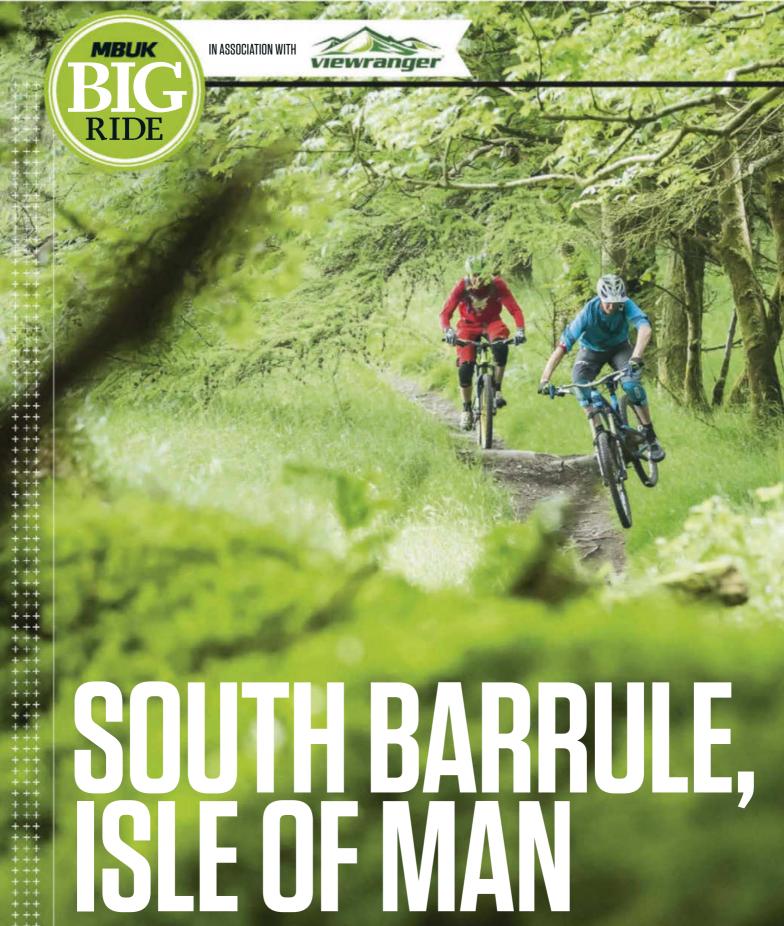




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AN ENDURO STYLE RIDE, LINKING UP EXCELLENT TECHNICAL SINGLETRACK IN THE ISLAND'S PLANTATIONS WITH SCENIC CROSS-COUNTRY TRAILS

Words Max Darkins Pics Russell Burton









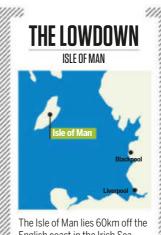
he Isle of Man sits in the Irish Sea, almost equidistant from Northern Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales. On a clear day you can see them all from one of the high points. It's not a clear day, so instead we're appreciating how the island is also a bit like a small-scale UK, with a Cornish style coastline, hills borrowed from Wales and moorland from the Peak District.

The IoM may be owned by the British Crown, but it isn't part of the UK or European Union and is self-governing, which is why they can have laws like having no national speed limit on the roads. It kind of reminds me of what it felt like to live on my own for the first time at uni. And yes, that means it's party time for the island too. The Isle of Man

is world renowned for the TT motorbike race held every year, but the good news spreads to the world of MTBing as well because the forestry body, DEFA, allows riders to roam the numerous plantations on this island, a bit like in Scotland.

Off-piste plantations

The Isle of Man hosts an annual end-to-end MTB race, but today's ride is more about the up-and-coming enduro scene on the island. Many of the plantations contain manmade trails, but they're not all marked out and there are lots of natural trails too, so it's more about exploring than following signs. We're therefore meeting up with Steve Collins, who organises some of these events, his trail building buddy Al Heginbotham, and Nigel, from the Manx MTB club. The plan is for an enduro style ride, linking the trails up in the



English coast in the Irish Sea.

Measuring 52km by 22km, the island has plenty of big hills and lots of excellent trails to explore.

www.visitisleofman.com





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various plantations, many of which are used in the enduro events throughout the year.

Our starting point is South Barrule plantation, which is largely regarded as the hub of MTB activity, although we're saving the riding here for later. The midges make sure we don't hang around in the car park, so after a minute of slapping at our faces and swearing lots, we're ready to get off.

Mind the mines

A gentle warm-up along a byway leads us to the Archallagan plantation, where there are a number of twisty singletrack trails. Although there's nothing steep or too technical, it's still good fun. After following a good winding trail that pops us out by the main car park (where there are some children's trails), we join the new Link track as we work our way north before exiting the trees and passing some derelict mineshafts.

After descending to the valley floor we pick up the converted railway line between Douglas and Peel, and follow it to St John's village. This is the only refreshment stop on the route, and although it comes a bit early, it allows the opportunity

to stock up on trail snacks for later in the day.

The climb up Slieau Whallian can only be put off for so long, but it is ridable and you can see Ireland from the top. Well, so we're told. The cloud is too low today, but I'm more interested in seeing the trails in Arrasey plantation anyway. This plantation is fun and technical, having been 'the' place for downhill runs, with its steep, twisty and rooty descents.

The rain has left the trail along the edge of the plantation damp and slippery, but once it dives under the cover of the trees it transforms into a wonderful twisting descent. Steve and Al race off, weaving and leaping between the trees on a trail they obviously know very well. I later find out why they helped build it. The tracks have held up well despite all the rain, which in part is due to the lack of traffic they see, and the upshot is that we get to ride some superb soft, loamy singletrack.

When we eventually get spat out at the valley bottom we're tempted to go back up for another run, but decide to push on. The grins are soon wiped off our faces because the next 'linking stage' heads steeply

and current, average and maximum speed, it'll turn your phone into a fully fledged GPS unit.

You can also use it to plan or download routes, access guidebookstyle information, broadcast your location and track your friends. It has a social platform too, where you can store and share their adventures.

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back up the hillside on the Pipeline trail. It is ridable though, and soon delivers us to the top of the hill, where we immediately join another newly built track downhill between the road and Glen Rushen plantation. This fast trail with ever-changing terrain keeps us on our toes until a short stretch of tarmac brings us to our next would-be timed stage - Kerroodhoo plantation.





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Stereo 140 HPA Pro 27" - 2016
Our Price £1799.00
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The trail here encourages you to pick up speed so you can get some air off the little jumps and drops, but it soon becomes twisty and slithery as it drops and winds between the trees. Steve and Al are in their element, using their motocross skills to slide the bikes around the corners and launch themselves into the air.

Gimme more

It's so much fun we can't resist a couple more runs back down, even though the climb back up is a bit of a reality check, with huge rocks forcing us off the bikes at the start. When we're done playing we have a long, hard but ridable climb out of the plantation, but a surprise treat awaits us at the next car park. Steve has had the cunning to leave his van parked up here earlier, stocked up with biscuits, a slab of rocky road and a stove to brew tea and coffee on. He even packed a load of chairs. What a genius!

Once we've polished everything off, the wind makes sure we don't linger, and we ascend the last leg to the very top. After skirting the hillside back to the Round Table crossroads (near Glen Rushen plantation) from earlier we reach Cringle plantation, which has plenty of trails, and technical ones at that. We join part of the 7km Cringle Blue Dot trail on the Riddler trail (aka Whisky to Water), along a good firm track that twists tightly through the trees. As the trail opens back up our speed increases, but the surface becomes more slithery and a heavy fall as I slide off the trail reminds me that it's not a good idea to try to chase Al's wheel.

Fast blast

Emerging by the reservoir, we can't resist another quick run down this trail, but by the time we're at the water's edge again the day has managed to slip past, so we make our way through Corlea plantation for the last run of the day, the South Barrule downhill.

But first we take the lower trail – the Tunnel of Love. Going down this tight, dark, wet trail isn't as fun as the name sounds, especially when a deep watery hole swallows my wheel and tosses me over the handlebars. The final descent soon has the smiles back on our faces though, as the stony track and boardwalk sections give us a super-fast and furious blast to the finish. In the failing light

Ard Jerkyll tearooms (01624 853409) on the A24, just east of Foxdale, is near the start/end of the route. It's a well-known stop for cyclists, who are made to feel very welcome, and they do good no-nonsense food and generous portions, perfect for hungry active folk. The staff are really friendly and there's seating inside and out. The jacket potatoes are good and the homemade cakes and coffee are just the ticket after a day's riding. Be aware that they don't take cards, only cash.

we quickly bundle our bikes and bodies into the van. It's been a fantastic day, and although we've just linked a bunch of trail centre style tracks together, we've still enjoyed that sense of adventure you get on XC rides.

They certainly like to do things differently on the Isle of Man, and their plantations may not be like the trail centres in the UK, but that's the point. It's not about everyone mindlessly following the same stale circuit, it's about exploring and mixing things up with some point-and-shoot manmade trails, and maybe even some good ol' fashioned getting lost. It's so enduro.

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the polar opposite of Matt. These guys have turned the dial right up to 11 from the get-go! Rach and I hang on for dear life at the back of the train as we get to grips — or not — with the decidedly greasy Shropshire mud.

Labour of love

Fun is definitely what Dave Pearce had in mind when he created the Hopton XC loops. Dave runs the local Pearce Cycles shop with his partner Lindsay and they've become synonymous with the mountain bike scene here, running an exceptionally popular race series. Dave spends his own time and money building and maintaining the trails - this is a labour of love. With plenty of improvements planned over winter, come summer Hopton

will be popping at the seams with new features.

After the first densely wooded section the forest gives way to a disused quarry. Moss lines the trailsides and you feel like you're riding through a scene from Avatar. The trail also transforms from a pine needle carpeted cushion to a rocky, thumpier, swooping section. Sandy leads us out, hotly followed by Rach. Simmonds and I follow on behind, keen to get as wild as possible. With plenty of switchbacks and a quick successions of turns, you can really work on your Scandi flick, effectively making your back wheel chase the front in an opposite slide around the turn. Simmonds has this technique absolutely dialled, and the rocky ground helps coax his back wheel into







The Wrecking Crew Who are we?





Staff Writer Rach is an ex copper, but takes no prisoners on the trail!

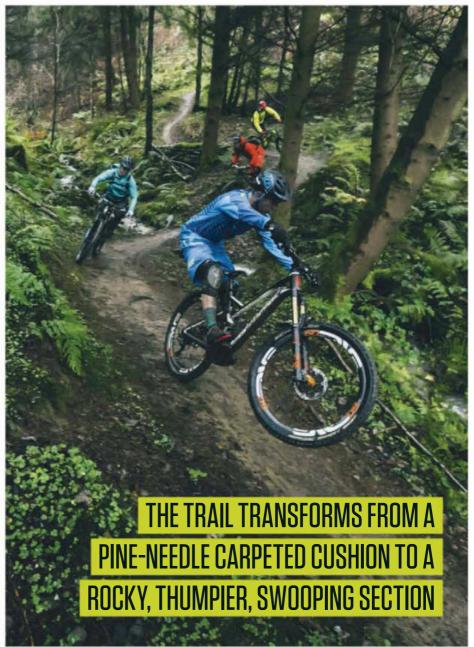
JAMES BLACKWELL

Five foot of trouble, Art Ed Jimmer rides quick and talks even quicker





ROB WEAVER Tech Ed Rob is a racer at heart but loves a bit of downhill action





LOCAL Knowledge

LOCALS DO ...

- Respect the trails
- Bring spares and food

LOCALS DON'T...

- Drop litter or spoil nature
- Make unofficial trail modifications
- Antagonise walkers or horse riders

a perfect drift. Sandy and Rach are also having a whale of a time, shouting and cheering at the slip-sliding drifty joy the trail is giving them.

Obviously, the trail's not all downhill. We finally reach a climb, which gives us time to think about the bit we've just ridden. Sandy and Matt are both keen to point out that this isn't a trail centre like we all know and love, rather it's a waymarked trail, hinting at its natural-feeling character.

Dave has put careful consideration into the route, with intersecting fireroads at key points of the trail. If you don't fancy riding one section, you can hop onto the fireroad to miss it out and join on at the next bit. It also means you can mix up the XC track with the plethora of DH trails in the woods — if you're on a burly trail bike the downhills are awesomely good fun.

Heading over the brow of the hill, Matt and Sandy assure us

that the next section is to die for — turn after turn made of the plushest dirt in Shropshire. It certainly doesn't disappoint.

Drifty delight

Simmonds leads me out and I try my best to stay hot on his tail as he drifts and speeds his way around the turns, leaving an impressive mark behind him as his tyres carve their way through the soft dirt. The loamy turns are punctuated by small hops and jumps so you can unweight the bike over the small crests into the corners. This is prime drift territory, and you've got to love a bit of back wheel to get the most out of it!

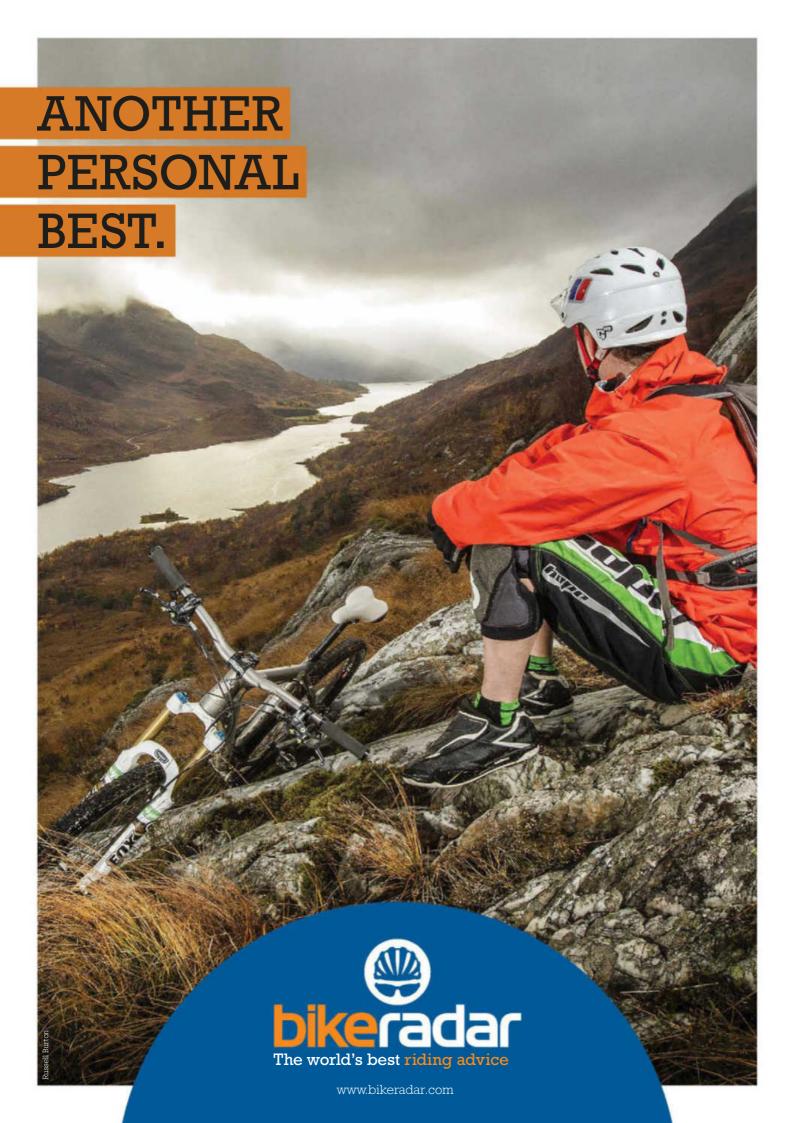
As this section ends we break out of the dark woods into a clear-felled area where the trail undulates its way across the hill, popping up and down and over and around tree stumps. At the bottom, we dig in for a longer and steeper climb. We all catch our breath at the



WRECKING CREW WISDOM

"Hopton Woods can only be described as pure Shropshire gold. Its varied terrain means it's suitable for the intermediate to advanced rider, with enough technical features to keep even a 160mm trail bike on the limiter. If you've anything left in the tank after a lap of the red loop, you can winch yourself back to the top where you're spoilt for choice with several cracking DH runs. With so much going on in this woodland, it's worthy of a day out for sure."

SANDY PLENTY RACER AND BIKE SHOP OWNER







top, enjoying the magnificent view over the Shropshire Hills.

Wipeout

Nearing the end of the loop, we once again enter the woods for the final descent. Rach leads out, pumping her way down the track and gaining speed with each turn and bump. Simmonds and Sandy follow, taking high lines into turns and transferring from one side of the trail to the other. There's some super-

greasy dirt in these woods and I hit the deck — front wheel washouts are always there to catch you off-guard! This little foray to the floor for soil samples doesn't dampen the mood though, and before we know it we're going for 'one last run' on this awesome section of trail.

Sprinting down the hill, Sandy suddenly grabs a handful of brake and locks both wheels, leading to a massive, bar-

THE DIRECTORY

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT HOPTON WOODS

GET THERE

Head to Craven Arms, then take the B4368 towards Clun. At Purslow turn onto the B4385 towards Hopton Castle. Turn off for the castle, and just past the castle turn right down the lane. Continue for a minute or so and you'll see the Hopton Woods sign. Turn left up the gravel track to the car park.

FACILITIES

None except car park

BIKE SHOPS

Pearce Cycles, Ludlow www.pearcecycles.co.uk The Trailhead, Shrewsbury www.thetrailhead.co.uk

WHAT ELSE IS NEARBY?

Bringewood

Old-school downhill trails, a load of singletrack and awesome XC riding very close to Hopton

Bucknell

A 30-minute drive from Hopton, Bucknell also has some great downhill tracks

Eastridge

You'll find blue and red XC loops, an orange 'extreme DH' trail and another, older DH track

VERDICT

Hopton Woods is located in the heart of the Shropshire Hills and has a wealth of waymarked and other trails. With regular uplift days (run by Pearce Cycles), we'd definitely recommend a visit. If you're in the area, why not check out all the other riding? There are infinite XC routes across the Long Mynd too. It would make for a great weekend getaway!



twistingly fast crash. There's a nervous wait until, winded, he lifts himself from the ground. It's at this point we know it's okay to laugh! That was a close shave though, so we know it's the right time to end the day.

It's just a gentle roll back to the car park from here and we all glance at each other with that knowing look. It's been one awesome day, in part made by the people and in part by a very special place.



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DIRECTORY

RETAIL



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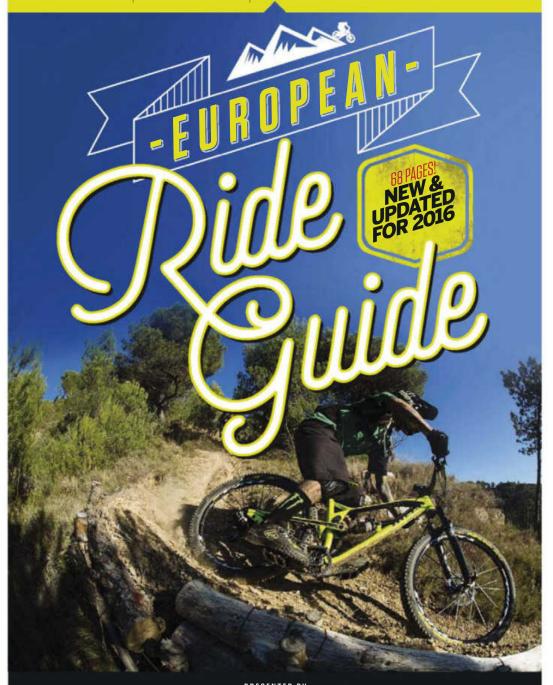
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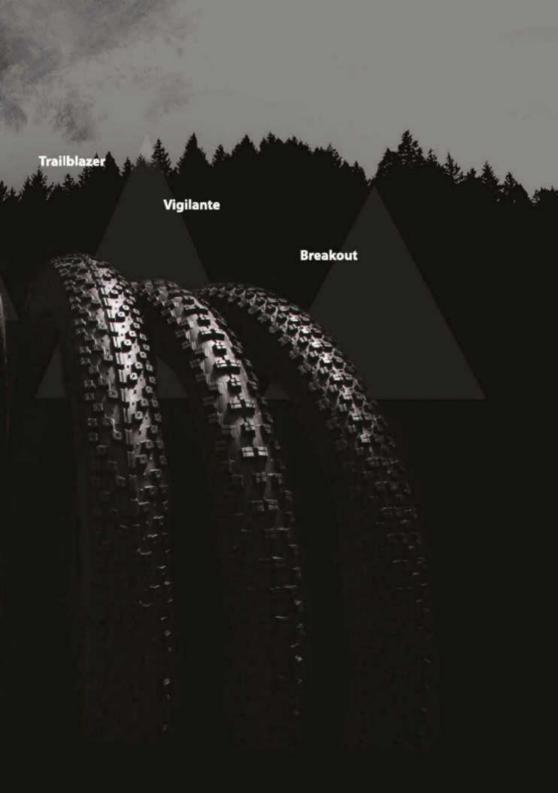


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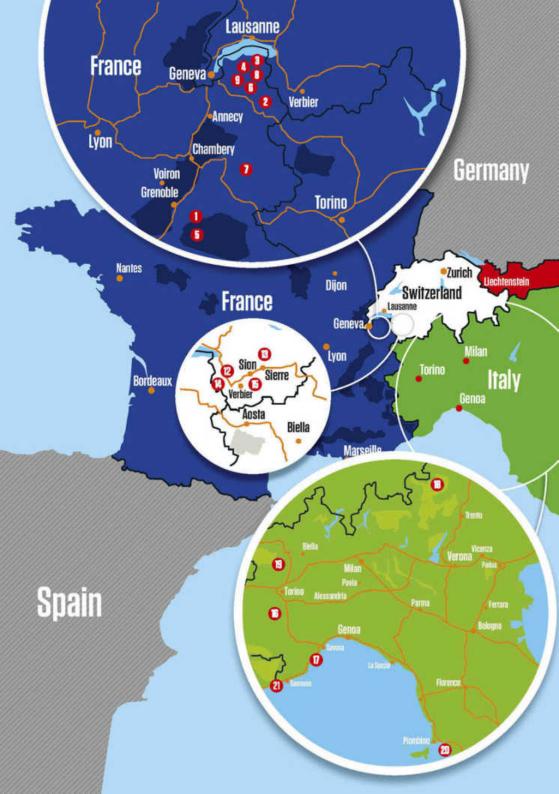






Alex EvansMBUK Features Editor

20 years, and some of us have even lived in the Alps, so we've learned a thing or two about where to – and not to – point our wheels. So grab a cup of tea, read this guide and plan your next adventure!







Grenoble is the closest airport to Alpe d'Huez but flights there from the UK are sparse during the summer. The other – and often cheaper – option is to fly to Geneva in Switzerland. From there, it's a 2hrs 30mins transfer to Alpe d'Huez. If you want to drive from the UK, allow 9hrs to get from Calais to Alpe d'Huez.

HE SWITCHBACKED ROAD UP TO
Alpe d'Huez is one of the most
infamous climbs in the Tour de France,
but the resort has gained infamy
among mountain bikers for a very different
reason – it's the site of the Megavalanche, the
legendarily bonkers mass-start enduro
downhill race that it's often claimed every
'real' mountain biker needs to ride.

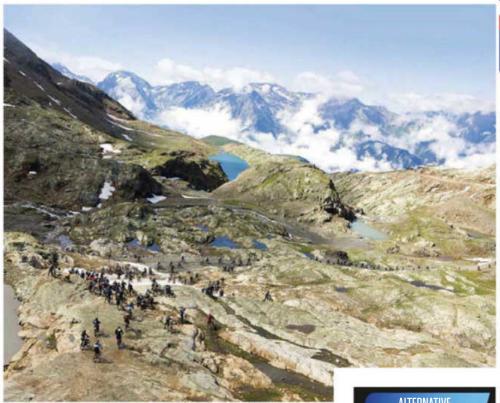
This focus on the Mega and its epic 30km route means that many of the other great



trails in the area are ridden less than they deserve, so if you're willing to stray off the (very) beaten track, you could find some gems. From the green trails that are accessed from the central DMC lift to the red and black runs heading down to Allemont and Bourg d'Oisans, there's a trail for everyone, even relatively inexperienced riders, whether you're into smashing downhill turns or taking in the views on some alpine singletrack.

The resort itself isn't cheap – its ski season prices last throughout the summer, so expect to pay around &10 for a pint! Eating out won't break the bank though, because most bars and restaurants have a special menu for mountain bikers costing &10 to &15 for a couple of courses and a drink, which is bang-on for a lunchtime fill-up.

Alpe d'Huez is relatively busy throughout the summer but during Megavalanche week the town is filled to bursting, so it may be better to wait until the circus has rolled out of town if you just want to go riding rather than racing.



THE LOWDOWN...

KEY INFO

Accommodation Alpine Heros

www.alpineheros.com

Ecrins Lodge www.ecrinslodge.com

Eating

There are some good cafes and restaurants on Avenue des Jeux. just up from the ice rink

Guide

Bike Oisans www.bike-oisans.com

ROUGH COST

Flight £200

Accommodation £200 for a week

Spending money €250

Lift pass

€86 for a week

Opening time /ideal season June to September



ALTERNATIVE ACCOMMODATION

Alpe d'Huez too pricey? Try these alternatives...

If you want to ride in Alpe d'Huez that doesn't mean you have to stay there too. Allemont on the valley floor has a couple of campsites and there's a free bus service to get you to the lifts and trails, which run right back to the village. Vaujany is just over the valley and has a lift directly connected with the top of the Megavalanche qualifying track. It's a cool, super-modern village with a chilled vibe, huge escalators and free wi-fi everywhere. Have a look at these alternatives if you don't want to be in the thick of it or just fancy a more authentic alpine experience this summer.



Chamonix is just over 1hr from Geneva Airport, There are transfer companies running in the summer, or you can hire a car. If you're driving from the UK. Chamonix is about 8hrs from Calais.

HAMONIX IS HOME TO SOME amazing singletrack, from flowing high-mountain traverses to root-infested woodland loam lower down. Check what you're allowed to ride though, because many lifts and trails are closed to mountain bikers during the peak summer months due to the high number of walkers. This includes the famous Aiguille Du Midi with its access to the Vallée Blanche glacier - no bikes are allowed up there, though it's worth catching the cable car just for the view at the top. The majority of the riding is on the Brévent/Flégère side of the valley, though there are also some stunning descents to be had in Vallorcine, not too far away.

Chamonix stays busy throughout the summer, being at the foot of Mont Blanc, but it's more popular with hikers than bikers. The atmosphere is generally pretty chilled out, though there are places to have a few drinks if you fancy a late night before hitting the trails again the next day. The local cuisine is great and won't break the bank.

THE LOWDOWN...

KEY INFO

Accommodation **MBMB**

www.mbmb.co.uk

Le Faucigny www.hotelfaucignychamonix.com

Eating

Pocoloco Burger Bar +33 (0)450 534 303

La Caleche www. restaurant-caleche.com

Guide **MBMB** www.mbmb.co.uk

ROUGH COST

Flight £200

Accommodation £250 for a week

Spending money €250

Lift pass €135 for a week

Opening time /ideal season July to September



Magic Transfers (www. magic-transfers.com) will get you from Geneva Airport to Châtel in 1hr 30mins. If you're driving from the UK, the journey from Calais takes about 8hrs. ART OF THE POPULAR PORTES DU Soleil area, which includes many of the top French and Swiss mountain biking spots, Châtel is home to some of the craziest trails you'll ever come across.

If airtime is your thing, the pilgrimage to the Pré-la-Joux area is a trip you won't be sorry you made. Air Voltage and Zougouloukata are two trails that'll keep you airborne for just as long as you're on terra firma! There are green, blue and red runs to hone your skills on too – 22 trails in total, offering something for everyone, whether you're on a DH rig or an enduro bike.

The town stays busy throughout the summer, which translates into long lift queues on sunny days, though the lines move quickly. Free buses are laid on to take you and your bike from Châtel's town square up to Pré-la-Joux, so you can spend more time on the trails than riding to get there.

While you're in Châtel, it's worth getting a ride on the Fantasticable (www.fantasticable. com) – two zipwire runs that shoot you across the valley, 240m up.

THE LOWDOWN.

KEY INFO

Accommodation Hotel Le Renard www.renardhotel.com

Eating Le Cheserv

+33 (0)450 735 425

Guide Fcole V

Ecole VTT Chatel +33 (0)789 088 562

ROUGH COST

Flight £200

Accommodation £200 for a week

Spending money €250

Lift pass

€110 for a week – covers the whole Portes du Soleil area

Opening time /ideal season

Mid June to September



A transfer to Les Arcs takes 2hrs from Geneva Airport. If you're heading to Les Arcs on a package holiday, the company you go with should offer a transfer. Otherwise, it's probably best to hire a car. If you're roadtripping, Les Arcs is a 3hr drive through the mountains from Morzine and 9hrs from Calais

ES ARCS IS ONE OF THE QUIETER

alpine resorts in summer but it has some of the best singletrack in the Alps. It's a trail bike heaven, with no real need for a downhill rig.

Some of the best trails run lower down the mountain, underneath the funicular railway that runs between Bourg-Saint-Maurice on the valley floor and Arc 1600. This runs into the evenings and can even be used during the winter months if there's no snow on the trails. You'll often find bikers sharing it with skiers at the beginning and end of the winter season.

As well as the waymarked trails, Les Arcs has tons of unmarked singletrack, which is best ridden with a guide if you're keen to find the really good stuff. There's enough to challenge everyone, even super-skilled riders.

There are a few mountain bike friendly chalets in the villages between Les Arcs and La Plagne, where the lifts are open during summer. The Vanoise Express cable car offers the opportunity to extend your riding into the La Plagne ski area.

THE LOWDOWN...

KEY INFO

Accommodation Loft Mountain Hostel www.loftbourg.com

Eating

La Vache +33 (0)479 080 463

BKM

bar-kingmad.com

Guide

trailAddiction www.trailaddiction.com

ROUGH COST

Flight £250

Accommodation €400 for a week

Spending money €150

Lift pass

€82 for a week

Opening time
/ideal season
End of June to August



The best way to get to Les Deux Alpes is to fly to Grenoble, then take a transfer, which takes 1hr 30mins. Flights are sparse in summer though, and a flight to Geneva may be easier to come by, though the transfer will take an extra hour. If driving. head south past Lyon. through Grenoble and into the mountains. The journey from Calais takes around 9hrs.

ES DEUX ALPES IS BEST KNOWN

among mountain bikers for its mass-start enduro downhill race, the Mountain of Hell. It's similar to the Megavalanche in close-by Alpe d'Huez, but even more brutal. The course starts from the glacier and descends 2,600m over 20km before reaching the finish line in Venosc.

If that all sounds a bit gnarly, don't worry – Les Deux Alpes has trails for all abilities, and the huge difference in altitude here (the town is at 1,650m and the top of the mountain is at 3,600m) means the variety of tracks is second to none, with snow, rocks, groomed dirt and loose turns to tackle. Additionally, if you buy a six-day lift pass you'll get a free day's riding in Alpe d'Huez thrown in.

The resort is high enough that there's snow on its glacier all year round, so don't be surprised if you find yourself sharing a lift with skiers and snowboarders. This means Les Deux Alpes stays busy throughout the summer – and you can ski every morning if you fancy it!

THE LOWDOWN...

KEY INFO

Accommodation Hotel des Neiges

hoteldesneiges.fr Eating

La Crêperie du Centre, opposite the lift, is good for quick food.

Restaurant Le Cellier www.restaurantlecellier-les2alpes.com

Guide

All the routes are easy to follow with a trail map

ROUGH COST

Flight £200

Accommodation £350 for a week

Spending money €250

Lift pass €122.50 for six days

Opening time /ideal season Mid June to end of August



Flights to Geneva
Airport will get you
close – a transfer takes
just over 1hr. Regular
buses run from the
airport if you're on
a budget, though
transfers are easy
to book and shouldn't
cost more than
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It's an 8hr drive to
It's a 8hr drive to

ES GETS KICKS OFF THE SUMMER season in the Portes du Soleil – it's the

season in the Portes du Soleil – it's the first resort to open its lifts to bikers and its trails are busy from day one. The large volume of traffic means the tracks get worn out pretty quickly, though an active trail building team do their best to flatten the braking bumps. The small town is going to be in the spotlight this year when it hosts the European round of the Crankworx bike festival for the first time.

Les Chavannes is the main lift, offering access to trails of every grade and the Les Gets Bikepark. The Mont Chery lift on the other side of the valley gives access to blue and red XC loops, as well as a gnarly black-graded jump track called Gets Airline that's sure to get the blood pumping. It's a short ride down the hill to Morzine, and the rest of the Portes du Soleil area is easily accessible too.

Nightlife is a big deal in Les Gets. There are plenty of bars and restaurants, as well as the Igloo club. The Zebra 3 bar almost guarantees carnage and a slow start the next morning!

THE LOWDOWN...

KEY INFO

Accommodation Riders Retreat

www.riders-retreat.co.uk

Eating

La Case K2 is great for burgers and lunch +33 (0)450 797 809

Le Boomerang www.leboomerang.com

Guide

The Portes du Soleil lift map will be enough – all the trails are easy to follow

ROUGH COST

Flight £200

Accommodation £300 for a week

Spending money €200

Lift pass

€110 for a week – covers the whole Portes du Soleil area

Opening time /ideal season

Mid June to September (plus weekends from late May)





Méribel is a similar distance from the airports at Lyon, Grenoble and Geneva, with transfer times of around 2hrs. The drive from Calais takes 8hrs.

mountain bike map in 2014 with the success of the World Cup finals there. The DH course was notable for being almost entirely natural and extremely challenging. The resort is adding

ÉRIBEL WAS PUT ON THE

more trails year on year and is pushing to be a big-hitter on the MTB holiday scene.

All of Méribel's trails are accessed from two main lifts, the Tougnète and Pas du Lac. These are split into upper and lower sections, so you can disembark halfway up to ride the lower trails or stay on to access the higher tracks and link to Val Thorens and Courchevel. The trails here are quiet compared to many other French resorts. As well as the World Cup track there are purpose-built descents rated from green to black, but to get the most out of Méribel you need to get out and explore.

A downhill bike isn't necessary unless you're intending to solely ride the World Cup track. A 6in-travel trail/enduro bike is ideal to make the most of the area and explore its many off-piste singletrack descents.

THE LOWDOWN...

KEY INFO

AccommodationPierre & Vacances

www.pierreet vacances.com

Eating

Méribel has a wide range of eateries, from burger bars to swanky restaurants

Guide

La Trace Verte www.latraceverte.com

ROUGH COST

Flight £200

Accommodation £350 for a week

Spending money €250

Lift pass €52 for a week

Opening time /ideal season July to August

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Geneva Airport is a 1hr 30mins drive from Morzine, with plenty of transfer companies working throughout the summer to get you there. If you're driving, it's a 550-mile, 8hr blast from Calais. HE 'CAPITAL' OF THE PORTES DU

Soleil has been a favourite with UK mountain bikers for years. Located right in the centre of the area, it's an easy base for getting around and the hills that surround it have some of the region's best riding.

Morzine is predominantly a downhill location, with the Le Pleney and Super Morzine lifts on either side of the valley giving access to a multitude of DH runs graded from blue to double black as well as a few 'secret' local-built tracks that are worth looking for. Even the blue trails are fun for experienced riders, while also



giving newer or less confident riders somewhere to get rad.

Don't just stick with these busy areas though – get out and explore. There are some stunning natural trails around Morzine, as well as links to other, smaller resorts. Almost everyone is on a downhill bike, but there's so much more to Morzine than just hammering out laps of Le Pleney. Everything is ridable and fun on an enduro bike too – though you'll need to be prepared to get physical!

Morzine is busy throughout the summer, especially during the week of the Pass'Portes du Soleil (see page 66). The huge number of Brits calling it home means you won't have any language barrier issues here! The nightlife at weekends is pretty hot – try not to get mesmerised by the dancefloor lights at Le Paradis! – and if you want a break or just to spend a day chilling out, there's a big outdoor swimming pool, as well as coffee shops and cafes. If you want to go self-catering, there are a couple of supermarkets in town, as well as numerous bakeries and smaller shops.



THE LOWDOWN...

KEY INFO

Accommodation

BikeMorzine www.bikemorzine.com Riders Refuge

www.ridersrefuge.co.uk

Eating

Try Mamma's Morzine for quick, good food www.mammas.fr

La Chaudanne www.lachaudannemorzine.com

Nightlife

Chez Roger, Le Crépu, Opera Club and Le Paradis are the places to be seen

Guide

RideAbility www.ride-ability.com

ROUGH COST

Flight £200

Accommodation

£200 for a week

Spending money €200

Lift pass

€110 for a week covers the whole Portes du Soleil area

Opening time /ideal season

Mid June to September

TOP THREE TRAILS

Le Pleney

Morzine's original downhill run is still its most famous and a real blast to ride.

Hattock

Built by an infamous crew of riders back in the summer of 2008, this trail remained hidden and unofficial for many years until the progressive crew of trail builders on the Super Morzine side of the valley reclaimed it and rejuvenated its turns. If you've got a DH bike we can highly recommend this one!

Secret trails

If you've got a keen eye you'll soon spot some of the off-piste stuff hidden in the woods. Many of the trails aren't for the faint-hearted, so make sure to respect the mountain!







MOUNTAIN BIKE HOLIDAYS - FRENCH ALPS -

MORZINE C LES GETS CHATEL



SECURE BIKE STORAGE FREE CLEANING PRODUCTS

10

CENTRAL LOCATIONS

CLIENT DISCOUNTS















A transfer from Geneva Airport takes 1hr. If you're driving, the journey to Samoëns takes 8hrs once you're off the ferry at Calais.

UCH IS THE QUALITY OF RIDING IN this lesser-known jewel of the Portes du Soleil that Samoëns hosted a round of the Enduro World Series in 2015. The mountainsides around here are scattered with some of the best trails we've ever come across. They're old-school in nature, with mud, roots and rocks creating some challenging features and some of the longest and hardest off-camber sections we've ever thought of pointing a bike along. There are more trails to explore in the Grand Massif area too.

Despite being a simple trip over the Col de Joux Plane from its better known neighbours. Morzine and Les Gets. Samoëns is still authentically French and it's unusual to spot another Brit there in summer. The allimportant patisseries are top notch, and there's a botanical garden if you want some chill-out time away from the bike. There aren't many modern buildings and the atmosphere is quiet and refined. Hop on the reasonably priced lift though, and you'll find yourself doing anything but chilling out.

THE LOWDOWN...

KEY INFO

Accommodation Bike Alp

www.bike-alp.com

Eating

Le Monde a L'Envers www.boogieandko.com

Guide Bike Alp

www.bike-alp.com

ROUGH COST

Flight £200

Accommodation £350 for a week

Spending money €250

Lift pass

€70 for 15 return tickets (Samoëns)/€108 for six days (Grand Massif)

Opening time /ideal season Early July to late August







Fly into Salzburg or Munich. A transfer will take 1hr 15mins or 2hrs 15mins respectively. If you're driving from the UK, Leogang is 11hrs from Calais.

EOGANG IS A TINY TOWN THAT

hosts some of the biggest events in mountain biking, from downhill and cross-country World Cup rounds (and the 2012 World Championships) to the 26TRIX dirt jump competition and Out of Bounds festival, and White Style, the winter freeride competition.

It's home to Austria's biggest bike park, which has seven trails – ranging from singletrack descents to jump-packed downhill runs – a dirt jump area and a freeride park. The tracks aren't all for advanced riders though. The Panorama Tour is a lift-assisted trail bike adventure that takes in some of the area's best scenery, and there's a kids' skills area too.

There isn't a lot in Leogang – it's more of a resort than a town – but there are a few restaurants dotted between the hotels, as well as most of the hotels having somewhere to eat. The Outback bar is the place for a mad one, and it's packed at weekends. Die Riederalm is a great afternoon stop-off where you can watch the bike park action over a beer.

THE LOWDOWN...

KEY INFO

AccommodationDie Riederalm
www.riederalm.com

Bergblick

www.bergblickappt.com

Die Riederalm

www.riederalm.com Outback Leogang www.outback-leogang.at

Guide

There are lots of guiding options at www.bikepark-leogang.com

ROUGH COST

Flight £250

Accommodation £500 for a week

Spending money €200

Lift pass €154 for six days

Opening time /ideal season

15 May to October



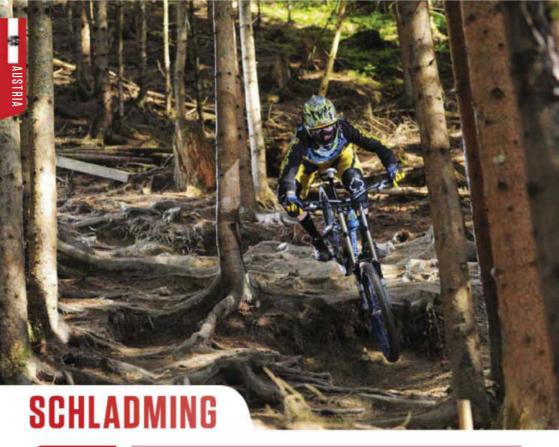
WELCOME TO THE DARKSIDE



WWW.NUKEPRO







Fly to Salzburg. From there, Schladming is a 1hr drive away. Public transport is top notch – you can get to Schladming by taking a bus and then a train, though it's not easy if you have a bike and kit with you. The drive from Calais takes about 11hrs.

CHLADMING IS HOME TO THE

Planai bike park, which has something for everyone, including blue, red and black-graded downhill trails, dirt jumps, a pump track and a challenging 4X course.

It's the World Cup downhill track that's really put this place on the map though – a rooty, rocky and steep racers' favourite that's a real challenge to ride at speed, with harsh compressions, big jumps and fast turns. It's enough to test even the best riders.

The blue Rookie Trail is an ideal place to start hitting some descents, dropping 1,000m in altitude, while the dirt jumps, pump track and 4X track at the bottom of the hill offer an evening's worth of sessioning fun.

Evening fun doesn't stop there though. The nightlife at Schladming is as wild as you want it to be, with plenty of places for a beer and some food at reasonable prices. It's not too far from Leogang either, so you could easily combine the two places to get some more varied riding in.

THE LOWDOWN...

KEY INFO

Accommodation
Appartement Augasse

www.schladmingappartements.at/en

Eating

Maria's Mexican www.marias mexican.net

Guide

Bikepark Planai www.bikeparkplanai.at

ROUGH COST

Flight £250

Accommodation £350 for a week

Spending money €150

Lift pass €125 for a week

Opening time /ideal season

/ideal seasonLate May to September

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OPANGERIKES



Champéry is a 1hr 30mins drive from Geneva Airport. Transfer companies operate throughout the

summer. It's easy to get there by railway too trains go direct from the airport with one change, and you can get off in Champéry village. A transfer is definitely the better option if you're in a group though. If you're driving from the UK, the journey from

Calais takes 8hrs.

HAMPÉRY IS HOME TO ONE OF THE most feared downhill tracks on the World Cup circuit. Standing at the start it feels like you could take one big jump and land in the finish area - it's that steep! Packed with roots, rocks and challenging turns, you only have to check out Danny Hart's World Champs winning run from 2011 on YouTube to see just how tough it is. There are several singletrack downhill trails too, along with a world-class XC loop.

Champéry itself isn't big - it's more of a large village than a town. The atmosphere is great though, and on summer evenings you'll find a fair number of riders out on the town for a beer or three. Because you're over the Swiss border everything is more expensive, especially eating out and drinking in bars. Being part of the Portes du Soleil, you do get access to the whole area with just one lift pass though, and you can pop over the hill into Les Crosets for some less steep but still advanced and fun trails if you want to warm up before you hit the really hard stuff!

THE LOWDOWN...

KEY INFO

Accommodation Le Petit Baroudeur www.lebaroudeur.ch

Chalet information at www.champery.ch

Eating

l'Atelier Gourmand www.atelier-gourmand. ch/restaurant

Café du Centre www.centrechampery. ch/en

Guide

www.portesdu soleil.com

ROUGH COST

Flight £200

> Accommodation £240 for a week

Spending money

£400

Lift pass

€110 for a week covers the whole Portes du Soleil region

Opening time /ideal season June to September



DEFY GRAVITY

DBX ENDURO LITE WP 2.0



chest harness



2.0 litre Flat CleanTech Bladder



5.0 | tre Cargo capacity









INSPIRING CONFIDENCE

296-15 | © Leatt Corporation 2015



Crans-Montana is 2hrs from Geneva Airport, with much of the drive on mountain roads rather than motorways, and 9hrs from Calais. RANS-MONTANA IS AN EXCLUSIVE ski resort that opens its lifts and trail network to well-heeled mountain bikers in summer. There's over 170km of marked trails and plenty more off-piste singletrack to explore – but don't expect to stay here on the cheap.

Our favourite trail is the black-rated downhill run. Fifteen minutes of big grins as you shoot over big rock drops and through technical turns make this a 'must ride' descent. There's also a long, enduro style descent from the peak of the mountain down to Sierre, with a funicular to take you back up to Crans-Montana. If you fancy a bit of a play, you can head to the mini bike park at the bottom of the hill, which is littered with jumps and drops.

Crans-Montana is an exclusive resort, and a Swiss one at that, so it isn't cheap by any means – 100CHF (approx £72) a night is about the least you can expect to pay for accommodation, and eating out is also fairly expensive. The food is always good though.

THE LOWDOWN...

KEY INFO

Accommodation

There's a wide range of options at www. crans-montana.ch

Eating

La Désalpe www.ladesalpe.ch

Guide

Crans-Montana Bike Park www.crans-montana. ch/ete/en/bikepark

ROUGH COST

Flight £200

Accommodation £475 for a week

Spending money 400CHF

Lift pass

30CHF for a day/ 55CHF for a weekend

Opening time /ideal season

/ideal season Mid June to late September



From Geneva Airport, a transfer to Morgins takes 1hr 45mins. Morzine is a 45min drive away. The journey from Calais takes 8hrs. orgins is overshabowed by its more famous Portes du Soleil neighbours, Morzine, Les Gets and Châtel, but if it's downhill riding you're into, it's an undiscovered jewel. Located just over the Swiss border, it has graded DH runs for all abilities, from first-time downhillers to World Cup pros. Perfectly linked turns, fun jumps and some of the gnarliest root sections we've ridden are all contained on this one piece of mountainside.

If the quite simply awesome trails aren't enough, maybe the fact that there's a pump track next to a bar, with hardtails that are free to just grab and ride, will persuade you to make the journey. This place is rad! The prices are the most reasonable we've come across in Switzerland too.

You can stay in Morgins, but it's a quiet village and you'll need to book in advance. Alternatively, you can make the trip from Châtel, a 15-minute drive away. You can access the rest of the Portes Du Soleil resorts by bike, but some are quite a ride away!

THE LOWDOWN...

KEY INFO

Accommodation

You can find a range of places to stay here: www.morgins.ch/ particuliers-ete.html

Eating

Restaurant Chalet-Neuf +41 (0)244 771 296

Guide

Follow the bike park map or pick up a free map from the lift station

ROUGH COST

Flight £200

Accommodation £400 per week

Spending money €350

Lift pass

€110 for a week – covers the whole Portes du Soleil area

Opening time /ideal season

Mid June to mid September



Verbier is a 2hr drive from Geneva Airport, where hire cars and transfers are available. You can also take the train - it stops in the village of Le Chable, next to the lift station. If you're roadtripping, Verbier is a 9hr drive from Calais.

hether you're into XC or enduro, freeride or DH, you'll find a huge variety of riding in Verbier. For gravity riders, there are seven downhill runs graded from blue to black. The harder trails get pretty technical and steep, but the blue jump trail is a fun one to blast down too. Three of the tracks have Freelap timing built in, so you can race your mates or try to beat your own times.

There's plenty of enduro and XC riding too, though it's good to have a guide because the best bits of trail aren't easy to find unless you're a top notch map reader and have some local knowledge. Some of the best descents have to be accessed by van rather than chairlift, unless you like huge climbs. Look out for the yellow PostBus coaches that operate between Le Chable and Verbier – they can carry up to six bikes on special rear racks.

The village tends to stay pretty chilled-out and quiet throughout the summer months so Verbier definitely isn't one for the party animals out there.

THE LOWDOWN...

KEY INFO

AccommodationBike Verbier

www.bikeverbier.com

Eating

Verbier has everything from mountain snack shacks to cordon bleu www.verbinet.com/food

Guide

Bike Verbier www.bikeverbier.com

ROUGH COST

Flight £200

> Accommodation £750 for a week

Spending money 250CHF

250CHF Lift pass

34CHF for a day/ 126CHF for six days

Opening time /ideal season

July to late October (lifts open on weekends from early June)







Fly to Turin. A hire car is the best option for the 1hr drive to the resort. Sauze d'Oulx is only 30mins from the French border, through the Fréius Tunnel, From Calais, expect the drive to take 9hrs.

AUZE D'OULX IS A FAVOURITE among British skiers in winter and - along with the seven other Italian resorts that make up the Alpi Bike Park - now has a stunning variety of trails to coax you in during the summer months too.

Combining great natural terrain with some of the best manmade features you'll find in the Alps, it's become a regular stop on the very competitive Italian SuperEnduro calendar. The trails are a lot of fun, whether you're riding a DH rig or a trail bike. You'll find yourself laughing your way down the mountain while hitting big jumps and manicured berms.

In town you'll find top notch pizza, ice cream and coffee, along with the kind of laidback lifestyle we've come to expect of the Italians. While Sauze is the best base with the biggest mix of trails, its sister resorts are well worth exploring too. Cesana-Sansicario, Chiomonte, Claviere and Pragelato are perfect starting points for epic Alpine rides, while Bardonecchia is great for harder riding and Prali and Sestriere are lesser-known but just as challenging.

THE LOWDOWN...

KEY INFO

Accommodation Hotel la Fontaine www.lafontaine resort.com

Eating

Hotel la Fontaine www.lafontaine resort.com

Guide

MTR Skills www.mtbskills.co.uk

ROUGH COST

Flight

Accommodation £200 for a week

Spending money €250

Lift pass €60 for six days

Opening time

/ideal season June to September



From Nice Côte d'Azur Airport, it's a lovely 80-mile coastal drive to enduro nirvana. You can drive here from Morzine in around 4hrs.

INALE LIGURE IS A BEAUTIFUL TOWN on the Italian Riviera with plenty to

offer the discerning mountain biker and anyone they may have in tow. A staple on the Enduro World Series calendar, it has some of the most amazing natural and manmade tracks in Italy, and possibly the whole of Europe.

The area lends itself to trail/enduro bike use and there's plenty to ride, whether you're wanting to get on the uplift (vans with trailers are the norm here – Finale isn't a ski resort) and session downhill runs all day long or go for a self-propelled enduro adventure. Most of the trails finish in the hills above Finale, so you can roll down the hill (or take one of the tracks that finishes in town) to grab a well-earned pizza or calzone and a fresh beer, or a dip in the Med.

There's some nightlife in Finale, but during the autumn, winter and spring – the best times to head here – it's the seaside resort's off season so you're unlikely to find hoards of people 'on it'.

THE LOWDOWN...

KEY INFO

Accommodation

You can find a range of places to stay here: www.bikehotelsfinale ligure.it/en

Eating

Head to Sotto II Santo for great Italian food +39 (0)19 680 087

Guide

www.bikehotelsfinale ligure.it/en

ROUGH COST

Flight £200

Accommodation £400 (luxury)

Spending money €250

Lift pass

€500 for a week of van uplifts

Opening time /ideal season

Late summer to early summer the next year



Livigno is a fair old way from any of the Italian airports. We'd advise flying to Verona. from where it's a 3hr drive. Stop near Lake Garda on the way if you can. If you're driving from the UK, Livigno is 11hrs from Calais.

HIS TYPICALLY ALPINE TOWN IN

northern Italy is home to the Mottolino Bikepark, which has nine trails offering a mix of cross-country, enduro and downhill riding for all abilities. It also hosted the 2005 MTB World Championships. The track is still there and hasn't been dumbed down in any way - it's pretty full-on!

If you like to explore, you can get all over the mountain on the cross-country and enduro routes. Although these trails are lift-accessed, you should still expect to do some climbing along the way, but the views are well worth it.

Located close to the Swiss border, and only 50 miles or so from Austria, the village itself is a tourist destination as well as a mountain biking hotspot. Eating and drinking are up to the usual Italian high standards at reasonable prices, and the nightlife is chilled - although there are still plenty of places to get on the Limoncello if you're not planning on going out riding too early the next morning!

THE LOWDOWN..

KEY INFO

Accommodation Livigno Appartements

www.livignoappartements.com

Eating

Pizzeria la Rusticana +39 (0)342 996 047

Mottolino Fun Mountain www.mottolino.com

ROUGH COST

Flight

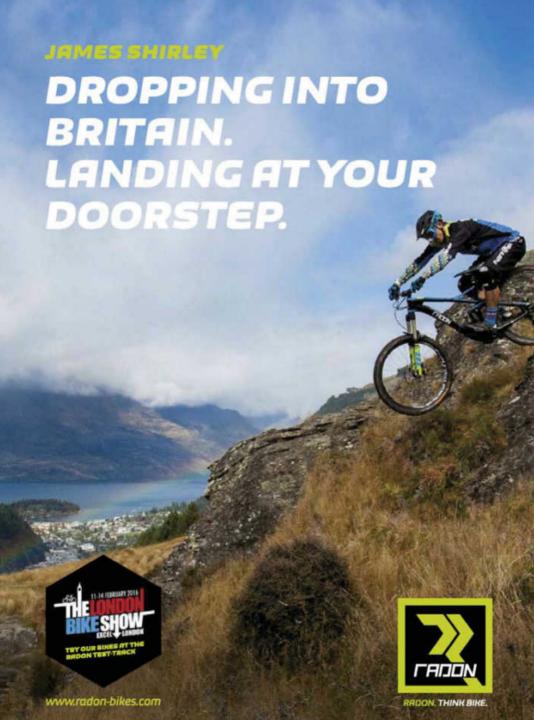
Accommodation £200 for a week

Spending money €200

Lift pass €99 for a week

Opening time/ideal season

June to September



Modulation



Pila is 1hr 30mins from Turin Airport with a hire car or transfer company. You can also get a train to Aosta and then a cable car up to the resort. Driving from Calais takes just over 9hrs. The Portes du Soleil is just 2hrs away through the Mont Blanc tunnel.

E'D HIGHLY RECOMMEND taking a full-on downhill bike if you're heading over to Pila because the dusty tracks are brutally fast and rough in places. There's still something for all abilities though, and the views across the valley are incredible.

The Aosta Freeride Trail is a must, starting from the resort and finishing at the Roman city of Aosta down on the valley floor, dropping 1,170m over 8km. It can be sessioned using the gondola, or it makes a great way to finish your day's riding if you park at the bottom. There's the World Cup track too, which hosted some legendary rounds in the early 2000s, along with three other downhill runs.

Pila somehow seems to dodge most of the bad weather that can afflict the rest of the Alps, so the trails are often knee-deep in dust. The resort itself is relatively quiet, with little open during the evening in the summer months. For a bit of variety take a trip to Aosta. where there's a whole city's worth of restaurants, bars and nightclubs.

THE LOWDOWN...

KEY INFO

Accommodation Hotel Lion Noir www.lionnoirhotel.com

Eating

Yeti Bar +39 (0)165 521 181

Guide

You can get mountain biking maps at the lift stations

ROUGH COST

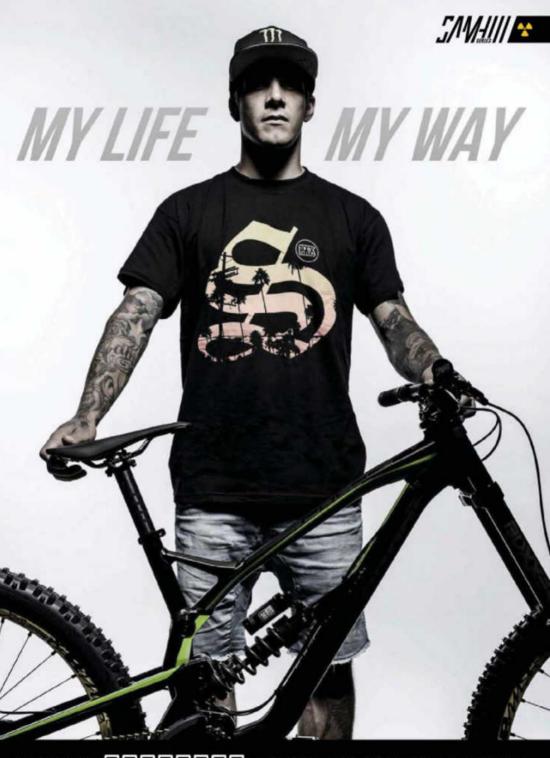
Flight £250

Accommodation £250 for a week

Spending money €250

Lift pass €15 for a day

Opening time /ideal season June to September





After flying into Pisa International Airport it's just a 90-minute journey to Punta Ala by car. You can also catch a train to Follonica, and a second from there to Punta Ala. UNTA ALA FIRST CAME ONTO OUR radar in 2013 when it hosted the inaugural Enduro World Series race and a Who's Who of MTB racing battled it out on a trail network formed from ancient pack horse paths, once used to transport coal down from the hills.

The Tuscan climate and landscape have combined here to produce one of the best riding areas in Europe, with some awesome enduro, XC and DH trails hidden in the mountains by the coast, amid beautiful scenery. There are two main riding areas – Bandite and Massa Marittima – which have more than 20 trails between them, with something for every ability.

This is a place where you can ride hard and then relax equally hard, either in the peaceful countryside or on the beautiful beaches. We recommend going in April/May or September/October for cool breezes, quiet beaches and plenty of riding time. Head out in the summer and you can expect scorching sun that'll limit you to early morning rides.

THE LOWDOWN...

KEY INFO

Accommodation
B&B Boccadalma
www.boccadalma.com
Punta Ala Camping
Resort
www.campingpuntala.it

Eating

Punta Ala Camping Resort has two good restaurants www.campingpuntala.it

Guide

Punta Ala Cycle Tours www.puntalacycle tours.com

ROUGH COST

Flight £200

Accommodation €500

Spending money €200

Lift pass

A full day's uplift costs around €60

Opening time/ ideal season

Spring, summer and early autumn





Fly to Nice Côte d'Azur Airport. From there it's a 50min car journey. Sanremo Bike Resort can arrange transfers when you book your holiday. It's easy to get there by train too – buses run directly from the airport to the railway station and you can get to Sanremo with just one change. ANREMO (SOMETIMES KNOWN AS San Remo) is a city on the Mediterranean coast of Liguria in

Mediterranean coast of Liguria in north-west Italy. Here there's a massive mix of XC, enduro and DH tracks, as well as some family routes – 35 trails in total, many starting 1,000m up in the mountains and ending right on the edge of town.

The legendary San Romolo downhill track is where 10-time world champ Nico Vouilloz heads for a lot of his testing for Lapierre and Michelin, and it's ridable 365 days a year. The 3km Tubi enduro trail is another good option for honing your skills. Some of the other routes are hard to find though and there's no official trail map, so it's a good idea to hire a guide.

Sanremo is known for its road race (the Milan-San Remo, one of the 'Spring Classics') and its casino, which attracts a glamorous clientele. There's plenty of more down-to-earth nightlife too though. Two hours down the road is the enduro hotspot of Finale Ligure, making two great riding spots easily accessible in one holiday.

THE LOWDOWN...

KEY INFO

Accommodation Villaggio dei Fiori

www.villaggiodeifiori.it Hotel Belsoggiorno www.belsoggiorno.net

Eating

Pasta e Pizza Sanremo

Ristorante Dall'Ava www.ristorante dallava.com

Bagni Tahiti Sanremo www.bagnitahiti.com

Guide

RivieraBike www.rivierabike.co.uk

More information at www.sanremobike resort.it

ROUGH COST

Flight £200

Accommodation £200

Spending money

Lift pass

Expect to pay €250 for a week's shuttling www.sanremobike resort.it

Opening time/ ideal season September to June





For trail guides, video previews, accommodation, nightlife and more, check out our website at

www.sanremobikeresort.it f sanremobikeresort sanremobikeresort



HOW TO...

PACK YOUR BIKE

A bike bag is great for protecting your pride and joy from airport baggage handlers, but if you're on a tight budget a cardboard bike box will do the job

TOP TIP

Pack cleverly! You can use things like knee pads to protect your bike, and if you have enough weight allowance you can pack out your bike box with holiday essentials such as shoes and clothes.

Frame

Wrap as much of the frame as you can in bubble wrap or pipe lagging, making sure that the sides are protected at the very least. Leave the cranks attached but put a good thick layer of bubble wrap and cardboard around the large chainring to protect it – and the bottom of the box/bag – from damage.

Pedals

Remove the pedals and wrap them in bubble wrap or cardboard. If you're using a cardboard box, tape them to the bottom or under the saddle to stop them moving around in transit. If you've got a bag, stick them in one of the pockets.

Fork

It's essential to protect the fork's stanchions and lower legs from damage. Use pipe lagging or bubble wrap to properly pad them out, especially the stanchions.

Wheels

If possible, leave the back wheel in the frame to protect the rear mech (for this reason, a long, thin box is better than a shorter, wider one). It's a good idea to take the brake rotors off to stop them getting bent out of shape. Slip some cardboard between the front wheel and frame to prevent scratches.

Brakes

Put pad spacers in both callipers to prevent brake lever overnent popping the pistons out.

Mech and hanger

wrap the rear mech and mech hanger in bubble wrap. If you're using a bike bag, remove them and tape or ziptie them to the frame.

Bar and stem

R move the handlebar and stem and wrap them in bbble wrap. Ziptie them to the frame, somewhere where they won't get damaged.

BIKE BAG OPTIONS



CRC Complete Bike and Wheel Bags £89.99 www.chainreactioncycles.com

The wheel bags will keep your hoops safe, and the heavy-duty fabric bag will outlast a cardboard casket. Often discounted too.



Brand-X Eva Bike Pod £19900

www.hotlines-uk.com

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EVOC Bike Travel Bag £299 www.silverfish-uk.com

The Rolls-Royce of bike bags. All the protection you need, along with in-built wheel bags. Big enough for a 29er or downhill bike too.





1 Full-face helmet and/or enduro lid

Helmet choice depends on the type of terrain and trails you're planning to ride. If in doubt, go for more protection rather than less. You could always take both!



Quality of the control of the con

Goggles are best for downhill riding, while glasses give wider vision and better airflow for enduro/trail duties. It wouldn't hurt to take both, but try to avoid the 'glasses and full-face' fashion faux pas!



Waterproof

Even if the forecast is amazing, take a waterproof jacket. Mountain storms come thick and fast, and you don't want to be caught out.



Gloves

Your hands will need protecting when the inevitable happens and you crash – mountain terrain isn't skin friendly.



Pads and armour

Knee pads are the least you should take, but pack full body armour if you're doing more extreme riding.



Riding shoes

Take comfortable shoes, and a couple of pairs if you can – that way, wet shoes will get a chance to dry out.



Jerseys

Take as many as you can! Lots of alpine riding equals stinky kit and it's unlikely you'll do your laundry there.



8 Shorts

Again, take as many pairs as you car Heavier materials may cause you to sweat a bit more but they'll protect you better if you crash.



Riding pack

A decent hydration pack with room for tools and spares is essential, and works well as hand luggage too.

GET YOUR BIKE ROADTRIP READY

The trails you encounter in the mountains of Europe are likely to be longer, rougher and harder on your bike than anything you've ridden in the UK. A few changes to your bike set-up could make your trip a lot more fun

Tyre choice

If you've been thinking about going tubeless. now's the time. It'll almost certainly save you from pinch flats down the line, especially on rocky mountain terrain. Make sure to still carry a spare tube though, just in case you slash the tyre sidewall. It's also a good move to upgrade to tyres with a heavier casing and more aggressive tread. The difference in what you'll be able to get away with and the terrain you'll be able to ride will be massive. A 2.3-2.5in tyre should be just right.

2 Brake pads

A new set of pads will freshen up vour braking and is well worth the investment if you're planning on tackling new, more adventurous riding. Sintered pads last longer and are less prone to glazing than the organic/ resin variety. If your current pads still have plenty of life in them, it's worth whipping them out and buffing them with sandpaper to roughen the braking surfaces. Always take spares!

3 Dropper seatpost

Being able to drop or raise your saddle with the flick of a switch means you can adapt quickly to changes in terrain and gradient and make the most of every trail situation. The cost may seem high, but a dropper will transform your riding.

Suspension set-up

Get fully kitted up in your riding gear before fiddling with your settings - the extra weight added by body armour and packs can have a big effect on your suspension set-up. Rear shock sag should be set to about 30 per cent of the total travel. The fork should be set with about 20 per cent sag. If the riding you're planning on doing is particularly steep or has lots of big compressions, run your fork a little firmer - it'll keep the front end a little better supported.

Chain retention

The last thing you want on a fast descent is to lose your chain. We'd recommend fitting a clutch-equipped rear mech, combined with either a narrow/wide chainring up front or twin rings and a bashguard. More aggressive riders, or those with triple chainrings, may want to add an upper chain guide for extra security.

TOOLS FOR THE JOB



Essential kit

- 1 Assorted Allen and Torx kevs
- 2 Shock pump
- 3 Tyre levers
- 4 Zipties
- **5** Track pump (not pictured)

MAINTENANCE

Keep your bike clean

It's always worth giving your bike a clean and lube-up, no matter how much of a chore it may feel at the time. The dusty trails and sheer amount of riding you'll be doing on an overseas trip tend to dry out and wear off any chain lube pretty quickly, and your bike's suspension can take a battering too. Lube your chain, fork stanchions and shock shaft every night while checking for other problems too. Spotting issues early generally makes them easier and cheaper to sort out.

Bigger pedals

If you use clipless pedals, you'll know how small the target is to get your foot back in if you unclip. It's a good idea to go for pedals with a bigger cage like Shimano's M647s or CrankBrothers' Mallet DHs. These offer a bigger area to sit your foot on, more grip if you can't clip back in and more support once you are clipped in. Alternatively, you could run flat pedals.

Frame protection

Mountain riding can be really rocky, and a high-speed impact can wreck your frame. Invest in some protection, whether it's clear 3M tape or one of RockGuardZ's carbon down tube protectors (www.rockguardz.com).

8 Shorter stem

Fitting a shorter stem will give your bike a snappier, more responsive feel. It'll also make it easier to lift the front wheel over obstacles and to shift your weight further back on the bike. A stem around 50mm in length is normally perfect, but going as short as 35mm will help for aggressive downhill riding.

Wider bar

Wide bars give you more control. For a noticeable leverage advantage, go for one that's at least 740mm wide. If you don't like the way it feels, you can always cut it down.

10 Brake levers

If you're tackling steep terrain, run your levers slightly higher than usual. This will make them easier to reach when you're hanging off the back of the bike when descending. Wind in the reach too, to help keep arm pump at bay.

11 Rotors

Larger diameter brake rotors (180mm+) help disperse heat more effectively on long descents. This means less chance of your anchors fading or pumping up, so you'll still be able to control your speed effectively. Bigger rotors also help increase your stoppers' power, meaning you can brake later into corners and stay in control. They're easier on your arms too.





PERFECT YOUR

MOUNTAIN TECHNIQUE

Mountain riding is fast, steep and rough. You've set up your bike, now it's time to sharpen your skills! Follow these tips to show the mountains who's boss...

The ski lifts found in many European riding spots mean you can do more descending in a day than you would in a week – possibly a month – back home. But for riders with limited downhill experience, riding in the mountains can be a steep learning curve.

It's not the technicality that troubles most first-timers, but the excessive speed that's so easily gained and often not properly controlled. Rather than flowing down the trails, less experienced riders can quickly find themselves in a one-on-one battle with their brakes and bars – hello arm pump!

Speed will exploit weaknesses you never knew you had, so it's important to ride with good technique and know how to get grip and feel balanced at any angle. Get to grips with these key techniques and riding real mountains will become as enjoyable as it ought to be.





FLAT CORNERS

While there are hundreds of corner combinations in the mountains, it's usually the flat (non-bermed), loose turns that catch riders out. A slight weight imbalance or jab of the brakes at speed can lead to a wash-out, so it's important to find balance over the bike and commit to staying relaxed. Remember – no lean, no turn.





1. Look Keep your head up and eyes scanning the trail. Never stare at objects or points – you're pretty much guaranteed to hit them. Look towards the next feature or turn, not the one you're in.

2. Control Keep your elbows flexed so you can move the bike around underneath you and lean it from side to side to maintain control.

3. Speed Keep your speed under control by using the brakes progressively. If you do brake hard, remember to shift your body back and drive your weight through your heels.

4. Body weight
Keep your weight
over the pedals
by bending your
knees and
allowing your arms
to extend slightly.
This will keep you
balanced when the
trail points down.
Drop your heels
and keep your
hands light.

5. Line Choose a line and commit to it. Making a split-second decision to change direction or slam on the brakes at speed pits grip against gravity. The latter usually wins.

ROLL-INS

Nosing the front wheel from flat to vert can be daunting. The biggest mistake you can make is 'just leaning back', because this will put you out of balance. You'll struggle to feel in sync with the terrain, which will lead to a bucking feeling at the top and bottom when the bike quickly changes angle.

1 Ride towards the roll-in slowly and controlled, in your normal position. 2 As you reach the edge, push the bike forwards by extending your arms and bending your knees so your hips move back towards the rear tyre. 3 Keep your heels low to keep your weight through your feet, and control your speed by braking progressively if you need to. 4 As you reach the bottom, extend your legs to allow the bike to level out underneath you and to absorb the G-out.





ROADTRIP TIPS WORDS OF WISDOM

It can be daunting going away with your bike for the first time, but with a bit of thought and forward planning, it needn't be difficult. Here are some pointers to help you prepare for your first biking adventure on the Continent...



Pack smart

Don't just throw stuff into your bags — think about what you're packing and where you're putting it! Multi-tools and other sharp objects need to be stowed in your hold luggage or you risk having them taken off you by airport security. Always pack some underwear and socks in your hand luggage too — it's rare, but if your hold bag and bike don't turn up at the other end, at least you'll still have a change of pants!

Take a break

Even if you're only in Europe for a week, it's worth taking a bit of time off from riding to let your body recover. That way you're less likely to hurt yourself and you'll enjoy your time on the bike even more. If you're still feeling horrendous from resterday's physical punishment – or the antics of last night! – then take morning off, chill out and make the most of the sunshine.

Get out there!

There's more to Europe than the 21 resorts in this guide – great as they are! – with tons of lesser-known gems just waiting to be discovered. If you're not an out-and-out downhill rider, then taking a long-travel trail or enduro bike (140-180mm) out with you might be a better choice. Hire a guide to show you some 'secret' trails, or if you're good with maps and feeling confident, have an explore yourself. Just make sure to always stay safe!



Do it yourself

If you want to save cash, hire a self-catering chalet with a group of mates and cook for yourselves. Food isn't expensive on the Continent if you're willing to buy local products and ingredients. It can be pricier in the resorts though, so if you're driving over, load up before you leave. Make sure to take teabags – French tea just isn't the same!

Pay the toll

If you're driving through France, Switzerland, Italy or Austria you'll need to factor in the cost of motorway tolls as well as fuel. In France motorways are ticketed so you pay for the distance you drive. Expect to fork out between €80 and €100 (£60-75) at toll booths to get to the Alps. Italy uses a similar system. In Switzerland you have to pay around €40 (£30) for a sticker that you attach to the inside of your windscreen, like a tax disc. You can then use their motorways for the rest of the year. The situation in Austria is similar, but you can get a day pass (for around €15/£11) or week

Don't 'go Euro'

The French and Italian love of fashion sadly doesn't translate to the slopes. Copy local riders by wearing body armour over skintight Lycra or glasses with a funky-looking full-face helmet and you'll be the laughing stock of your mates. Padding up and investing in a decent lid are definitely worthwhile though.

BE PREPARED PACK SOME SPARES

The bike shops you'll find in the mountains of Europe tend to be ski shops that have been converted for a few months of summer trade, so they don't have the same buying power as your year-round LBS back in the UK. To avoid shelling out a small fortune on parts while you're away it's a good idea to chuck some essential spares in your kitbag.

Brake pads

Steeper terrain, trails you don't know and longer days of riding mean you'll be on the brakes a lot more than normal.

2 Shock bushes

More bumps mean more movement, and more movement means more wear on your bushings.

3 Lube and grease

The extreme conditions mean your chain will need a coating of lube every day. It's worth taking some grease too.

4 Gear cables

The bumpy terrain and increased movement of your rear mech will cause your cables to wear fast.

Chain quick links

A broken chain could ruin a ride, especially if it happens miles from where you're staying.

Rear mech

Rear mechs tend to bear the brunt of trail abuse. It's a good idea to take a spare mech hanger too – they can be hard to source.

Inner tubes

Punctures are inevitable on rocky mountainous terrain, so carry as many spare tubes as you can. If you're running a tubeless set-up, take some extra sealant too.





If the worst happens and things go wrong up in the mountains, it's vital you have decent insurance cover in place so you get properly looked after

If you're riding your bike overseas you need travel insurance – it's that simple. It's something people often leave to the last minute or even forget about altogether, but with no NHS to call upon, things can get very expensive, very quickly.

The first step is to get a
European Health Insurance Card
(EHIC). It won't cost you anything
and will allow you to get state
healthcare in countries in the
European Economic Area at a
reduced cost or for free – find out
more at www.nhs.co.uk.

Although the EHIC card will save you from some medical expenses, it won't cover the cost of getting to

hospital, and if you need airlifting off the mountain that's likely to run to thousands of euros. That's why you need a travel insurance policy too. And it's not just about peace of mind – it's now become the norm to have to show proof of your insurance to your accommodation provider.

When you're looking for insurance, you'll need to check the policy and make sure mountain biking is covered in the small print. If it's not covered, you'll need to have it added on, and you'll usually be charged for the privilege. Whether you'll be ambling down blue runs or thrashing World Cup DH courses, you'll still be taking

part in "lift-assisted mountain biking", which sounds pretty dangerous to insurers!

Also beware of companies that only cover mountain biking as long as it's not off-road. If you're racing, you'll need to make sure you're specifically covered for that too. It's a good idea to get a licence from British Cycling, which helps with the competition side of things when abroad.

Some good companies to use include Dogtag (www.dogtag. co.uk), InsureandGo (www. insureandgo.com) and Snowcard (www.snowcard.co.uk), but shop around to get the best price and policy for you and your holiday.

MUST DO EUROPEAN EVENTS

The Continent plays host to some of the biggest, baddest and maddest mountain bike events on earth. Here's our pick of four to check out, whether you're happier standing on the sidelines or want to get in on the action yourself



Pass'Portes du Soleil

It's not a race, more a big old gathering of riders from all over Europe who've come to explore the Portes du Soleil area. The lift pass is discounted and there's a marked 80km lift-assisted route that shows you the best of the trails. There are some harder options too, if that's your thing. The 2016 event takes place from 24 to 26 June. www.passportesdusoleil.com



Megavalanche Alpe d'Huez

The world's biggest enduro race sees 2,000 riders fight their way from the top of a glacier to the valley floor 2,500m below. Snow, rock and dirt – the Mega has it all, with a mammoth 30km finals track that's a challenge to ride down, let alone ride fast. This year's event kicks off on 4 July, with the finals on 10 July. http://tinyurl.com/mega2016



Crankworx Les Gets

'Crankworx Europe' transfers all the fun of the Whistler freeride fest to the French Alps, with a slopestyle comp, whip-off contest, downhill race and tons more action on the slopes, along with a bike expo and some serious partying back in town. This year it moves from Les Deux Alpes to Les Gets, from 15 to 19 June. www.crankworx.com/lesgets



DH World Championships

This year's UCI Downhill and Trials World Championships are taking place in Val di Sole, northern Italy, from 6 to 11 September. The DH track is a real brute so you can be sure of some amazing riding and epic racing. If you're out in the Alps on a late summer break or just fancy a weekend to remember, then go check it out! http://tinyurl.com/valdisole

VIBROCORE technology applies a complex cell, low density foam core within the handlebar, greatly reducing the high frequency vibrations that cause fatigue, numbness and "arm-pump"







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"THEY SAID THE WORLD WAS FLAT..."

